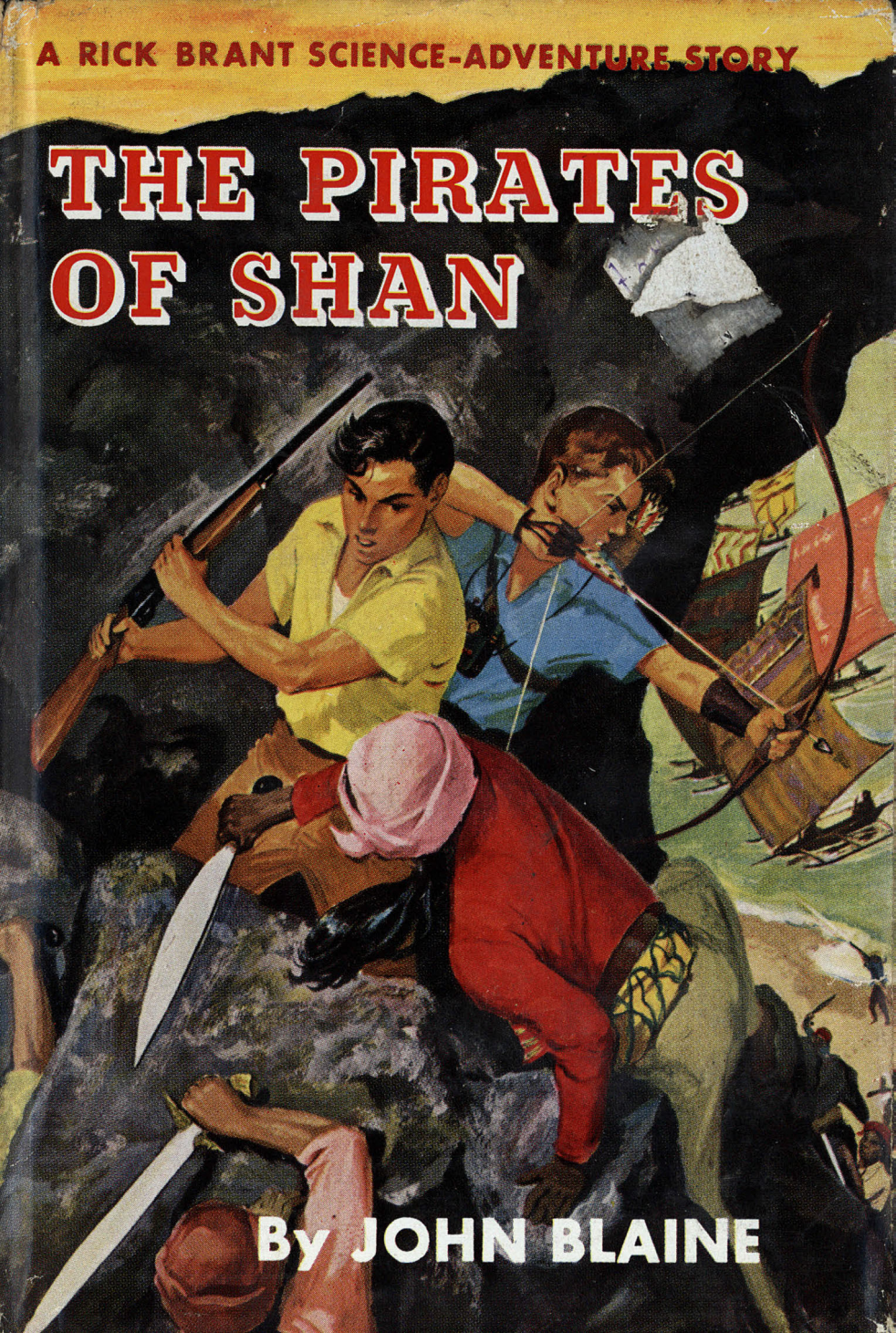
A RICK BRANT SCIENCE-ADVENTURE STORY

# THE PIRATES OF SHAN



By JOHN BLAINE

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# THE PIRATES OF SHAN

By JOHN BLAINE

Rick Brant and his pal, Scotty, are plunged into danger and excitement when they encounter the cutthroat pirates of Shan in the heart of the Pacific tropics.

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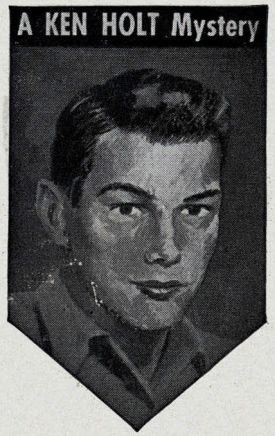


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# THE PIRATES OF SHAN

JOHN BLAINE

A RICK BRANT SCIENCE-ADVENTURE STORY

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THE ELECTRONIC MIND READER
THE SCARLET LAKE MYSTERY
THE PIRATES OF SHAN
THE BLUE GHOST MYSTERY

*Rick wielded the kris with deadly effect*

A RICK BRANT SCIENCE-ADVENTURE STORY

# THE PIRATES OF SHAN

BY JOHN BLAINE

GROSSET & DUNLAP PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK, N. Y.

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# THE PIRATES OF SHAN

CHAPTER I

# The Missing Scientists

"We'd better do something," Rick Brant stated grimly, "and we'd better do it fast." He picked up a stone and threw it far out into the green waters of the Atlantic, a gesture that did little to relieve his worry and anxiety.

Don Scott, nicknamed Scotty, said soothingly, "I know how you feel. I feel the same way. But don't forget that Dad is just as worried as we are—maybe even more so, because he feels responsible. Besides, I don't think we have long to wait, not with Colonel Rojas here."

Rick knew that his dark-haired pal was right, but inaction, even under ordinary circumstances, made him restless, and now that two staff scientists had mysteriously disappeared, his normal desire to keep things moving swiftly was augmented by fear for their safety.

The Spindrift Scientific Foundation, with headquarters on famed Spindrift Island off the New

Jersey coast, was regarded by most people as a typical group of scientists, impersonal and efficient, who sometimes made important discoveries or got involved in scientific adventures. But the picture of the Foundation, given mostly through impersonal scientific publications, was wrong.

The scientific efficiency and purpose of Spindrift could not be denied. But what the public failed to appreciate was that the staff, headed by Rick Brant's scientist father, was more like a family than a corporation. The center of activity was the big Brant house and the adjoining laboratory on Spindrift Island. The scientists were not only colleagues, but close personal friends.

As a consequence, when the staff zoologist, Dr. Howard Shannon, and the staff archaeologist, Dr. Anthony Briotti, failed to turn up on schedule from an expedition to the Sulu Sea, the entire Foundation became personally concerned. All work stopped while the staff speculated on what might have happened, what course of action to take.

Rick Brant and his pal Scotty were particularly upset when the days passed and Hartson Brant failed to decide on a course of action. Rick knew, of course, that his father was proceeding logically, obtaining information by cable and phone from the Philippines, but he resented the passing days.

"I'm glad Rojas is here," Rick said. "That must mean Dad is making up his mind. And you know what I hope, don't you?"

"Same as I do. But don't hope too much. Maybe

Dad will decide this is a job for professionals, and not for us."

Hartson Brant had returned only a few minutes ago from a hurried trip to New York. He had brought with him Colonel Felix Rojas of the Philippines Constabulary. The tall, slender officer was at present on duty with his country's United Nations delegation. He was an old friend, dating back to the adventure of *The Golden Skull* when Rick, Scotty, Chahda, and Tony Briotti had gone to the fabulous rice terraces of Ifugao.

The colonel was having a belated lunch with Dr. and Mrs. Brant, and Rick's father had indicated politely but firmly that the two boys were not to broach the subject of the missing scientists until the colonel had finished eating. Dr. Brant had promised to call them for the meeting which was to take place immediately after lunch. Both boys were so impatient for the meeting to begin that it seemed to them the others were taking an unduly long time to consume the meal.

"Rick, Scotty. Come on into the library."

The boys turned swiftly at Hartson Brant's call and hurried from the waterfront to the big Brant house. As they entered, Hobart Zircon was just coming down the stairs from his room. The distinguished nuclear physicist greeted them with a comradely wink. "So you two are attending the meeting too, eh? I have an idea we may be joining forces again."

Zircon had shared many adventures with the boys. More than once, his enormous size and legendary

strength had gotten them out of a tight spot. The physicist was considerably over six feet tall and built like a fighting bull, and he had a booming voice that fitted his physique.

Hartson Brant introduced Zircon to Colonel Rojas, waved the group to seats, and got down to business. He addressed the Filipino officer. "First, let me say for all of us that we are indebted to you for leaving your office on such short notice to give us the benefit of your advice and counsel."

"It is nothing. If I can be of help, I will be grateful. Perhaps if you will start at the beginning, it will clarify things."

The scientist nodded assent. "I'll be glad to. As I told you on the way over, two of our staff members are missing. You know one of them—Dr. Anthony Briotti. The other is Dr. Howard Shannon, our zoologist. Tony, of course, is an archaeologist. They departed for the Sulu Sea several weeks ago on a joint expedition to try to find new evidence for a theory of migration of the early peoples in the Pacific."

Hobart Zircon added, "We started on this theory some time ago with a trip to an island in the western Pacific. Dr. Briotti continued that work during the rice-terrace expedition. I believe you met him then."

"I did," Colonel Rojas agreed. "How is the present expedition connected with your previous work? The combination of an archaeologist and a zoologist seems unusual."

"Tony has determined that the origins of the Bajaus, the Sea Gypsies of Sulu, may be of importance," Hartson Brant explained. "In addition, he wanted to check some details of Bagobo culture. Dr. Shannon hoped to contribute some evidence based on the early migration of some animals from the Asia mainland to the islands."

Colonel Rojas nodded. "I understand. The presence of some animals may show that a land bridge existed between Sulu and the mainland across which the early peoples may have migrated."

"Exactly. I'm sure you also know that our staff has been co-operating with Dr. Remedios Okola of the University of the Philippines. It was from him we learned that our friends had vanished, when they failed to keep an important appointment."

"You know their itinerary?"

"Yes. They flew to Manila and spent a few days with Dr. Okola. At that time he persuaded them to revise their schedule, to return to Manila long enough to join him on a trip to the rice terraces. They flew to Zamboanga, chartered a boat of some sort, and sailed to Davao by way of Cotabato. They were supposed to leave the boat at Davao and fly back to Manila to take the trip with Okola, after which they would return to Davao, pick up the boat, and go into the Sulu Sea." The scientist's lips tightened, then he added, "They never kept the appointment with Okola!"

"What did Okola do about it?"

"He got in touch with the constabulary and asked

for a check on their whereabouts, thinking they might have been delayed. The constabulary at Davao reported that Shannon and Briotti had reached Davao and hired a truck to take them to a Bagobo village. The truck driver let them off at a foot trail to the village. No one has seen them since."

Rojas rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "You have heard from the American consulate at Manila?"

"Yes, by phone, on the same day I talked with Okola. The consulate has asked your government for help. However, yesterday I received a cable stating that a second investigation has uncovered nothing new. It appears that both our governments have done all they can, but obviously we cannot stop there. So I have decided to send Dr. Zircon, with Rick and Scotty, to hunt for our friends."

Rick and Scotty exchanged relieved glances. It was what they had hoped and expected.

The colonel nodded. "I have not had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Zircon until now, but I have seen Rick and Scotty in action. They are resourceful, and they are lucky—two necessary qualities for a expedition such as this. Do you also plan to use their Hindu friend, Chahda?"

Rick leaned forward anxiously. He had suggested getting Chahda to help out several days ago, but his father was at that time waiting for further word from the American consulate. Chahda, a one-time Bombay beggar boy, had been a close friend since the Tibet relay expedition. He was a real wizard at uncovering information.

"Yes," Hartson Brant replied. "I have sent him a cable, through his organization, but he has not yet replied."

Chahda was now a combination assistant and secretary to the chief Far East agent for JANIG, the secret government agency charged with the protection of United States top secrets. The Hindu boy's boss, Carl Bradley, was an old friend of Hartson Brant. Rick knew that Bradley would release Chahda at once, if assistance to Spindrift was involved, not only because of his friendship for the Brants, but because the island scientists had once helped to solve a case for the Far East agent. Chahda would be especially helpful in the search for the missing scientists, because he knew his way around the Philippines and had friends there. It occurred to Rick that his father had probably wired Chahda, in care of Bradley, via the Spindrift contact in JANIG—Special Agent Steve Ames.

Colonel Rojas lighted a Manila cigar and settled back in his chair. "First of all, let us examine the area in which your friends have disappeared. Davao is on the island of Mindanao, the largest in the Philippines. It is peaceful, for the most part, even though we have a mixture of Moros, Christians, and pagans there."

Rick knew about the Moros, Filipinos of the Moslem faith. They were known as valiant and deadly fighting men. The pagans were primitive people, like the Bagobos.

"Davao is a large, fairly modern city. But once out-

side of the city itself, the country becomes wild. Some of the Bagobo villages are quite close to Davao. They are peaceful folk, and quite harmless, but there are savages in the back country who may not be."

"Perhaps we should take arms," Zircon said.

"I would say so. At least a rifle and a sidearm of some kind."

Scotty spoke up. "I can take my rifle."

"And I can borrow Hartson's forty-five automatic," Zircon added. "That should be enough."

"True," the colonel agreed. "You can always call on the constabulary for help. I will give you letters to all commanding officers in the area."

Rick knew that would open many doors, because Rojas was not only a former commandant of the constabulary, but popular with the entire force.

"How about clothing, Colonel?" Rick asked.

"I assume you will go by air. That means very little baggage. One tropical suit and the rest rough clothing would be my suggestion."

Scotty changed the subject. "Sir, have you any idea what might have happened to our friends?"

The officer shrugged. "No more than you have. Scientists generally are not rich enough to rob, but they are not so poor that they can be harmed with impunity. Robbery is always possible, although unlikely, with one exception. Did they have any weapons with them?"

"Shannon had a hunting bow and arrows," Mr. Brant replied. "He planned to collect some specimens. Briotti had no weapon at all."

"Then that eliminates the only robbery possibility I can think of. Had they been well armed, Moros might have attacked to get their weapons. The Moro loves weapons of all kinds, and may even kill to get them—a point you might remember."

Rick shook his head. "It's hard to imagine why anyone would want to harm them—if anyone did. I think we'd better get to Mindanao as soon as possible. When do we leave, Dad?"

"Tomorrow night, son. I made reservations for you while I was in New York this morning."

"Are we going to take special equipment?" Scotty asked.

Rick had been thinking about that very point. "I'm planning to take the Megabuck network. It will be useful if we have to separate."

The little network of three miniature radio units, transmitters, and receivers combined, had been of invaluable help in rounding up a group of foreign agents bent on stealing the plans for a United States intercontinental ballistic missile.

The unusual name, Megabuck, had grown out of a joke Rick had conceived about a "million bucks" television quiz program. Two of the sets were pocket size, and used hearing-aid-type earphones. The third had been made in the form of an ornamental hair band for Rick's sister Barby to wear. The tiny microphone worked by sound induction through the bones of the head. The earphone was incorporated into one end of the band.

Zircon and Scotty agreed that the radio units

might come in handy, and the physicist added, "I have a pocket-size, battery-operated wire recorder I use for making notes. I think I'll take that. It may be helpful for recording conversations for later translation."

"A good idea," the colonel approved. "The local dialect is called Chebucano. Of course many people speak some English. Have you an atlas? I think it might be useful if we went over a map of Mindanao and the Sulu Sea area."

The map study was very helpful. The three absorbed Colonel Rojas' fund of information about the area. It was a part of the world none of them had ever seen, located only a few degrees above the Equator in the deep tropics. To the west of Mindanao was the Sulu Sea, with the Celebes Sea to the south. The widely scattered centers of civilization had famous, imagination-stirring names, like Jolo, Tawi Tawi, Cotabato, and Zamboanga.

Later, the Filipino officer dictated letters of introduction to Rick's sister Barby, a pretty blond girl a year younger than her brother. Barby took the dictation directly on the typewriter. Once the letters were signed and turned over to Dr. Zircon, Hartson Brant escorted the colonel to the mainland, where arrangements had been made for a local taxi service to drive him back to New York. Rojas' parting statement was "This affair worries me. I shall be most interested in developments, and you may hear from me sooner than you think."

Later, Scotty and Rick gathered in the latter's

room and talked while loading the radio units with fresh batteries.

"Wonder how long it will take to hear from Chahda?" Rick asked.

"Depends on where he is and how fast Steve Ames can get a message to him. He'll join us if he can. You can bet on it."

"I hope so," Rick said thoughtfully. "We'll be in Manila in a couple of days, and we'll need him. We've got a job ahead of us, because Tony and Shannon aren't lost. You can be sure of that. They're not the kind to get lost. And if they had been in an accident of some kind we'd have heard."

"Meaning what?"

Rick's eyes met Scotty's. "That leaves only one logical answer, doesn't it? They've either been killed or captured!"

CHAPTER II

# The Hindu Merchant

THIRTY-SIX hours later, after a grueling transcontinental–trans-Pacific flight with only the briefest of stops to change planes, Rick, Scotty, and Zircon were in Manila. Their stay in Manila only three hours old, they had already visited the American consulate and found that no new information on the missing scientists had been received; they had arranged a luncheon date with Dr. Okola, and had reserved space on Philippine Airlines to Davao on the following morning.

Rick paced the floor, sipping a glass of fresh limeade, made with *calamansi,* the tiny, pungent local limes. His time for the past three days had been spent alternately dozing and thinking about the problem of the missing scientists. The more he wondered about their strange disappearance, the more worried he became.

"There's simply no reason for it," he said aloud.

Scotty looked up from the chair in which he was reading the Manila *Times.* The husky ex-Marine

didn't have to be told what his pal was thinking. "No reason we can see," he agreed. "But there has to be a reason."

Hobart Zircon spoke from the desk where he was writing a note to Hartson Brant. "You might remember, Rick, that we've been on other expeditions where the reason for certain events was just as puzzling."

Rick knew the kind of events the physicist meant. Only a few dozen yards from this very room, in the ancient walled city across the street, he and Scotty had been under rifle fire for a reason they couldn't have guessed at the time.

"Listen to this," Scotty said suddenly. He read from the newspaper. " 'The American consulate reported today that three members of the Spindrift Foundation staff have arrived in Manila to begin a search for the American scientists reported missing a short time ago. The scientists disappeared north of Davao.' End of item."

"That's short and to the point," Rick commented a little bitterly. "They certainly don't make much fuss over two missing Americans, do they?"

"And it's on page seventeen," Scotty added. He folded the paper back to the front page. "Look at this headline."

Across the top of the front page was emblazoned:

WHERE IS ELPIDIO TORRES?

"Who's he?" Rick asked.

"A Filipino kid. He ran away, got lost, or got kidnaped. No one knows which. His father is a big

sugar operator and politician. The kid has been gone for weeks, but the paper is still playing it up at the top of page one."

Rick snorted. "Headlines for one Filipino boy and page seventeen for two American scientists. Some contrast!"

Hobart Zircon fixed a stamp to his letter and walked over to the boys. "You're not thinking straight, Rick. Suppose two Filipino scientists were lost in the Rocky Mountains, and the son of a leading American citizen was missing. How would our own papers play it?"

Rick had to grin. "Emphasis on the local boy, I suppose. You're right, Professor. I'm just upset. I'd hoped for more from the consul this morning.

The vice-consul in charge of the case had nothing to add to what they already knew, and had slim hope of obtaining more information. The American ambassador had received assurances from the Philippines government that all possible aid would be given to the Spindrift search party, and that the constabulary would not give up the hunt. No more could be done. The American consulate had no resources with which to conduct a search.

"Come on," Zircon said. "It's time for lunch. Dr. Okola will be arriving in a few minutes."

"All right. But I wish we could really get started on our search, or find someone who could help us. Even Chahda hasn't shown up. We haven't even had a reply to Dad's message."

As they went down to the dining room Scotty

pointed out that Chahda might be very hard to reach. "For all we know, he could be in the interior of Malaya, or some unlikely place. He would come if he could, Rick."

Rick knew Scotty was right. Chahda had proved his loyalty and friendship more than once. Just the same, he had hoped Chahda would come. The Hindu boy with his "Worrold Alm-in-ack" education, as he called it, could be a great help. Chahda had not only memorized the entire *World Almanac,* but he seemed to have a sixth sense about people and places that was always a source of amazement to Rick and Scotty.

Lunch with Dr. Okola was pleasant, even though it did nothing to advance the search. Rick and Scotty reminisced about *The Golden Skull* expedition with the Filipino archaeologist and enjoyed the hour. They parted with Dr. Okola's assurances that he was ready to help in any way he could.

As Rick unlocked the door of their room after lunch, he said, "I guess it's up to us to . . ." He stopped with a yell of delight as the door swung open. Seated by the window, waiting for them, was a slim, brown-skinned boy in a turban. Chahda!

The Hindu boy pounded them in glee, then shook hands with Zircon. "It is good for old friends to meet," Chahda declared, "even in such unhappying soaking-stances."

"Circumstances," Rick corrected automatically. "Why didn't you wire? We thought JANIG hadn't been able to get our message to you."

"I was in Singapore with my boss, Carl Bradley," Chahda explained. "When your message comes, he says go now, Chahda. By the time a message back catches them, so will you. You know, he right? I get here before you, already two days now."

"Two days!" Scotty exclaimed. "What have you been doing?"

Chahda bowed. "Scotty, please to be speckfull. You now speak to Raman Sunda, salesman of cloths."

"I'll show proper speck," Scotty said with a grin. "Do you mean clothes?"

"Not clothes. Cloths. Tax-tills."

"Textiles," Zircon boomed. "Chahda, what on earth does a Hindu textile salesman have to do with finding Briotti and Shannon?"

"Plenty do with, Professor. In this country is plenty Hindus like me. Many sell tax-tills. So I travel, and listen. Yes?"

Rick still didn't get it. "But why, Chahda?"

"We face fact you like so much, Rick. Okay? This is country of brown-skinned people, like me. People talk to me when they not talk to you. So I go alone to Davao, on island of Mindanao. Is big city, says in 'Alm-in-ack.' Has 111,263 peoples. Some maybe know something, so my friends here, they send me to friend in Davao. He helps me meet people who can maybe help some more. Okay?"

"I should have known," Rick said with admiration. "Leave it to you to dig up an angle."

Chahda winked. "Among Hindus is always ideas. Now, I go Davao tonight. You coming too? Okay.

You stay at Apo View Hotel. Is very good. I stay there, too. We not knowing each other for little while, I think. That is why I come into your room with special key my boss gives me to open many doors. Better I work alone for now."

Scotty asked, "How much do you know about our friends' disappearance, Chahda?"

The Hindu boy launched into a concise and rapid summary. Rick wasn't surprised to find that Chahda knew everything they had found out.

"You never fail to amaze me," Zircon boomed.

Rick went to his suitcase and drew out the unit of the Megabuck network he had made for Barby. He explained its operation to Chahda, who promptly slid it under his turban where no one could see it.

"Sahib Brant plenty smart to make this," Chahda intoned. "Poor native boy salutes mighty scientist!" He ducked Rick's return swing.

Dr. Zircon had gone to his own suitcase. He returned with his pocket-size wire recorder and handed it to Chahda. "I brought this to record conversations in other languages. I think you might stimulate more interesting talk than we could, Chahda. It will record for an hour on a single spool."

Chahda took the gadget and checked its operation. Rick was amused to see that the "poor native boy" figured it out in something less than a minute, and put it casually in his coat pocket.

"We meet in Davao," Chahda said. He shook hands all around, then paused at the door. "Please, you good friends. I see you worry plenty. We find

Tony and Dr. Shannon. You see." He opened the door and was gone.

Rick breathed a sigh of relief. "I feel better," he stated. "Just seeing him again makes me feel good."

"I agree," Zircon said, "and so does Scotty. Now, we will do a little sight-seeing. I haven't been in downtown Manila for twenty years. We'll only worry and fret if we stay in this hotel room, so let's go."

The three taxied through the old walled city, then across the Pasig River and into Manila proper. They inspected the Escolta, principal street in the shopping area, then headed for Quiapo Square to see the great cathedral and the shops. Traffic was heavy, so they paid the taxi driver and got out and walked.

As they crossed a pedestrian overpass by the cathedral, Scotty said quietly, "In case you were feeling neglected, you can stop. We're being tailed." Rick and Zircon were too experienced to pause or show interest. Scotty added, "There's quite a mob on the sidewalk once we get down from this bridge. Push right into it. I'll drop out and intercept him. If we're being tailed, we want to know why."

The plan was executed smoothly. Rick was never sure when Scotty melted into a convenient doorway. After a moment he stopped and looked around. He was in time to see Scotty step from the doorway and confront a small, poorly dressed man who wore a red fez.

Rick and Zircon were at Scotty's side in an instant.

The man in the red fez reached for a pocket, and Rick tensed to swing if necessary. But the man only

drew out a cardboard pillbox. "Plenty bargain for Americans," he announced. "Me Moro from Sulu. My cousin best pearl diver in Jolo. He get real pearl, I sell. You look."

He opened the pillbox. Rick saw a half dozen pearls of assorted sizes.

"We're not interested," Zircon said flatly. "Sorry. Come on, boys."

They walked away, leaving the Moro staring after them.

Zircon chuckled. "A common thing, as I recall it. I also seem to remember that most of the pearl-selling Moros in Manila are not genuine. They're Visayans from Cebu trying to sell phony pearls to tourists."

"But he was trailing us," Scotty insisted.

"I don't doubt it in the least," Zircon replied. "He was probably sizing us up to see if we're tourists or local Americans. Is he trailing us now?"

Scotty took advantage of a plate-glass window to survey the street behind them. "Not that I can see," he admitted.

"All right. Let's not be jumpy, boys. Of course we want to know if, or why, anyone is shadowing us, but I think we have the answer in this case. Let's let it go at that."

CHAPTER III

# Bagobo Country

By ten o'clock on the following morning Rick and his friends were jouncing along a twisting, bumpy road into the foothills of Mindanao. They had risen with the dawn and taken Philippines Airlines, PAL for short, to Davao. On arrival they had checked in at the Apo View Hotel and had lost no time in finding local constabulary headquarters.

Major Paulo Lacson, in charge of the detachment, had instantly ordered a pair of command cars. Before the Spindrifters quite realized it, they were whisked out of town, en route to the point where Briotti and Shannon had vanished. Colonel Rojas' letter of introduction had really worked magic.

Rick stared out at the tropical landscape, and toward the peak of Mount Apo, an active volcano over nine thousand feet high, but he didn't really notice details. In a short while they would be at what he considered the real start of their search.

The major drove the lead car, with Zircon in front beside him. Rick and Scotty occupied the rear seat.

In the second car were four armed, enlisted men. As the small convoy roared toward the town of Calinan, Major Lacson told them all he knew of the case. It was the same information the three had already received, naturally enough, since their information had been based on the officer's reports.

Rick shook his head worriedly. If Lacson, obviously an intelligent and efficient officer, could find out no more, how could three strangers?

The command car whisked by an abacá plantation, with mile after mile of lush green bananalike abacá plants extending into the foothills.

"Look." Scotty pointed at drying racks on which Manila hemp fiber, product of the abacá, was drying. The fiber was a honey blond shade.

"It's just the color of Barby's hair," Rick exclaimed.

Major Lacson explained, "Abacá is graded by color. White is best, but that shade means it is very good. It will bring a good price." Then, as the command car topped a rise, the major pointed ahead. "There is Calinan."

The town was a small one, with stores and houses on both sides of a single main street. The place had a sleepy air.

At the edge of town Lacson drew up in front of a house that flew the flag of the republic. A sergeant ran out, came stiffly to attention, and saluted. After a brief command from the major, the sergeant ran to climb into the second car.

"Juan speaks a little Bagobo," Lacson explained. "He can translate for us."

The two cars moved through the town, past a group of colorfully arrayed people with flat turbans. "There are some Bagobos now," Lacson said. "They come to town to shop."

Rick looked with interest. In the few seconds before the car sped out of sight he saw that the primitives were light of skin, had pierced ears from which dangled loops, and that the men wore trousers formed of a single piece of cloth put on like a skirt, then pulled between the legs and fastened to an ornate belt. Their clothes were brightly colored.

As Calinan dropped behind, the country turned to tropical forest, with tall lauan and tanguile trees, the source of so-called Philippine mahogany. Once Rick saw coffee bushes growing under the trees.

Then, only a short distance from Calinan, the paved road came to an abrupt end and narrowed to little more than a dirt trail. The command car bucked over hummocks of cogon grass while the boys held on to keep from being tossed out. Finally, in a small clearing, the road petered out entirely.

This was the glade, Lacson explained, in which the truck driver had left Briotti and Shannon. No one had seen them since.

Towering trees cut off the sun and the air was heavy and damp with the smell of tropic growth. Mosquitoes whined.

Lacson handed around a small bottle of insect repellent. "Rub in well," he directed. "You can leave your coats in the car. It will be a warm hike."

Rick shed his coat gladly. They had worn their

tropical suits, and Lacson had rushed them off so fast there had been no chance to change.

The major gave orders in Chebucano. Two troopers saluted and fell back. They would stay with the cars. Juan, the trooper from Calinan, took the lead as the rest started up the trail that led into the jungle from the clearing.

"Juan knows the trail," Lacson said. "Also, he is good at spotting snakes and animals."

Rick fell into line behind Zircon and Lacson. Scotty walked at his side while the two enlisted men brought up the rear.

It was an eerie hike, through growth so thick one couldn't see more than five paces on either side of the trail. Overhead the foliage met, and the group walked through a kind of steaming green tunnel. The sun never penetrated to the jungle floor, where pale plants grew in profusion.

There was life in the trees overhead, heard but unseen. Once Rick recognized the howl of monkeys. Again, by the side of the trail, there was a sudden chittering and a tiny furry form made a fantastic leap to the safety of a rattan vine. Rick caught a glimpse of a monkeylike face and huge eyes.

"A tarsier," Zircon remarked. "Shannon had hoped to collect one."

Rick wondered whether Shannon and Briotti had hiked up this trail. The headman of the Bagobo village had told Lacson that the Americans had not been seen by his people. Might they have vanished on this trail?

He wiped his face and neck with a sodden handkerchief and plodded ahead through the green steam bath. Insects formed a cloud around his head, flew into his eyes and even into his mouth. He bore it stoically. It was as bad for the others.

Anyone who walked off the beaten trails would be helplessly lost without a compass or an experienced guide. A man could wander in the dense growth until death in some unpleasant form claimed him. One couldn't even see a trail from more than a few feet away.

Half an hour later, Rick saw that the growth was giving way to a different kind of jungle forest, as the trail sloped upward. In a short time they entered a more normal forest of tall, white lauans over a hundred feet high, with strange roots like flying buttresses.

Soon the forest gave way to open plain, sparsely dotted with papaya trees and a lone mango. Lacson called that they were almost at their destination. Rick wiped his face and was grateful. His clothes hung on him as though he had been caught in a torrential rain. In spite of the insect repellent, he had been chewed by assorted bugs.

He forgot his discomfort at the sight of the village. Apparently civilization had reached the Bagobos. The huts were of sawed lumber and tin roofing material. He saw one roof made from an American gasoline sign.

In contrast with the drab surroundings, the people were bright spots of color. They eyed the group

with frank curiosity, then followed as Juan led the way to the headman's hut.

The headman met them with dignified courtesy. Rick saw that the man was nearly six feet tall, with a lean, hawklike face, the skin stretched tightly over high cheekbones. He looked like an American Indian, but his skin was the color of a white man who has spent his life outdoors in the tropics. The Bagobos clearly were of a different race than the Filipinos.

"That's quite a man," Scotty whispered.

Rick nodded. He, too, was impressed by the headman, except for one thing. Although the Bagobo talked freely, through Juan, his eyes never once met those of any of the party. He looked everywhere but at the visitors.

It was out of character, Rick thought. This man, who obviously had a kind of fierce, barbaric pride, should look any man squarely in the eye.

The talk went smoothly, and Rick realized the headman had been through all this before, probably more than once, in interviews with the constabulary. To each question the Bagobo chieftain answered that he had seen no Americans, nor had his people. Had they come to the village, he would know it.

"We'll get nothing here," Zircon finally said to the major. "Frankly, I expected nothing. If there was information to be gained from this man, you could have gotten it."

Lacson shrugged. "True, perhaps. But I thought you would want to check for yourself."

Rick only half listened. He noticed a Bagobo

standing nearby, watching intently, and on impulse walked over to him and held out his hand. The warrior took it instantly and smiled, his brown eyes on Rick's.

Rick returned the smile and walked back to his friends, forehead wrinkled in thought. That had been a straightforward reaction; the Bagobo had met his eyes squarely and openly.

On the way back to Davao, Rick pondered the meaning of the headman's failure to look at any of them. But not until they were cleaning up at the hotel did he decide to put his thoughts into words.

"The headman lied," Rick stated. "I can't figure it any other way. It's easy to see that the Bagobos are a proud race. They're any man's equal, and they know it. The headman should be the proudest of all, but instead, he was shifty. He wouldn't look at any of us."

"That's right," Scotty acknowledged. "He kept his eyes everywhere but on us."

Rick nodded. "What's more, he's not a shifty type. He looks like a fierce old eagle who'd stare down a charging elephant. But he couldn't look at us because he was lying, and he was ashamed of it."

"You may have something," Zircon agreed after a moment of thought. "I wasn't that observant, but now that you mention it, I believe the headman kept his eyes on the ground most of the time. I agree it certainly seemed out of character."

"If he was lying, what can we do about it?" Scotty asked.

*The warrior shook Rick's hand and smiled*

Rick wasn't sure, but he had an idea of how to start. Earlier, immediately on arrival, he had tried to contact Chahda without success. Now he got a Megabuck unit, put the earplug into place, and tried again.

"Chahda, this is Rick. Are you on?"

The Hindu boy answered at once, and the signal was loud. He probably was in the hotel. "Waiting, Rick. Where you been?"

Rick quickly sketched the day's activities, and Chahda replied that he had spent time with his Indian contacts but had discovered nothing new.

"Okay, Rick," Chahda concluded. "I try to find out why headman lies. Tomorrow I go to Bagobo village to sell tax-tills. Be back noon, meet you hotel."

"I hope you find out more than we did," Rick said.

Chahda urged, "Please not to worry. This good day's work. One man who lies maybe has keys to many doors!"

CHAPTER IV

# The Headman's Secret

ON THE following morning Major Paulo Lacson joined the Spindrifters for breakfast at the hotel. The young officer answered questions about the region for an hour, but Rick refrained from bringing up the subject of the headman until breakfast was over. But that was deferred when Scotty asked a startling question.

"Major, what ever happened to the boat our friends came in?"

Lacson's eyebrows went up. "Boat? What boat?"

"You mean you didn't know they came by boat?" Zircon bellowed incredulously.

The major shook his head. "This is the first I have heard of a boat. I assumed they came by air. The instructions I got from Manila were simply to find two missing Americans, with their names and descriptions. Since most Americans stay at this hotel I inquired and found they had checked out. That established their presence in Davao. It didn't occur to me to be interested in where they had come

from, although I knew from my instructions that it was Zamboanga. Later, I checked the airline to see if they had left by air, but there was no record."

It was incredible, but there it was. Rick knew it was the kind of slip that often happens when the background given with instructions is not complete.

"I will get on this right away," Lacson said. "You have a description of the boat?"

"I'm afraid not. It was chartered in Zamboanga. Can you get a description from there?"

"Of course. It's strange the detail of the boat never came to light. Why, I even had a full description of their Moro guide."

"Guide?" The three said it simultaneously. It was their turn to be astonished. No one had mentioned a third person in the party.

"You didn't know?" Lacson clapped a hand to his forehead in a gesture of chagrin. "The lack of communications is ridiculous! Yes, they had a guide. Apparently they picked him up in Zamboanga. A young Moro, no outstanding features, who gave his name as Azid Hajullah. We have not been able to find out any more about him."

Lacson rose, to get a message off about the boat, but Rick stopped him and quickly outlined his conclusion about the headman, and Chahda's trip to the Bagobo village.

The major scratched his cheek thoughtfully. "It is just possible you are right," he said at last. "I myself noted that the old man was not at ease, but I attributed it to the presence of strange Americans,

plus my own official status. Many primitive peoples are shy in the presence of authority. However, I agree the headman may have overdone it somewhat. We will see. I will phone you when I have news of the boat, and perhaps you will let me know when you hear from this Indian friend of yours."

The morning dragged on after Lacson's departure. The three walked the streets of Davao and found it to be quite a modern city with two newspapers, a radio station, and some good stores. Both Rick and Scotty had the feeling that they were being watched, but the most careful observation failed to uncover a tail.

Nevertheless, the boys were certain their movements were known to someone. If only they could discover the invisible watcher, Rick thought, and squeeze some information out of him . . .

The tropical sun grew hot as the day progressed, and the three returned to the hotel and sat in the small dining room over cold limeades and chilled mango. Rick had kept the Megabuck earphone in place all morning, and as he started to order another mango, Chahda's voice sounded in his ear. "Rick, you there?"

"Here," he replied swiftly. "Go ahead."

"Got recording. I think you plenty on ball, Rick. Headman lied like champ. Meet you hotel room right away. I just driving up. What number room?"

Rick told the Hindu boy and signed off. He turned to the others. "Let's go. Chahda's got something!"

They hurried to their room, and Zircon at once

placed a call to Lacson. The constabulary office replied that the major was en route to the hotel and should be there in a few minutes.

Chahda burst into their room. The Hindu boy was grinning from ear to ear. He took the tiny recorder from his pocket and handed it to Zircon. "Plenty hot, you bet. Can I have drink, please?"

Scotty picked up the telephone and ordered him a double limeade with plenty of ice.

"Much thanks, Scotty. Well, this morning at dawn we merchants go to Bagobo village. Sell plenty cloths, too. You know some Bagobos speak a little English? Not much, but enough. While I sell, I start asking questions, but I get no answer. Then, boy my age starts buying cloth for new turban. We alone, so I try bribe. I say, 'Tell me about missing Americans and I give cloth for free.' And you know, he starts!"

"Go on, confound it!" Zircon bellowed. "Don't keep us in suspense like this."

"Okay, Professor. I talk fast. This boy gets no chance to say something, because headman busts in and he shoots words at boy like machine gun. Boy no more will talk to me, but I give him cloth, anyway. Because all the time I have wire machine going!"

"Wonderful!" Rick exclaimed. "Now, if we can only get it translated!"

Scotty opened the door at a knock and admitted Major Lacson. Zircon introduced Chahda and explained quickly what had happened. He showed the officer the wire recorder.

"Good!" Lacson picked up the telephone and made

a call. After a brief exchange in the local dialect he hung up. "We will take it to Davao University. Dr. Gonzalez, the professor of languages, will translate it. He speaks Bagobo expertly. Come. My car is outside."

Chahda hung back. "You go. Better I stay under cover while longer. You call me on radio when you find something."

Rick agreed, then followed the others. They piled into Lacson's command car and headed for the university.

"I have some news myself," Lacson reported. "Your friends came in a sloop called the *Sampaguita,* which is a local flower. They tied up at a private dock on the waterfront."

"Where is the boat now?" Scotty asked.

Lacson shrugged. "Who knows? No one saw it leave, but it was there the night your friends disappeared, and gone the following morning."

Rick pondered that bit of information while Lacson and Zircon worked with Dr. Gonzalez, a short, bald Filipino, on the translation of the wire recording. Certainly Briotti and Shannon wouldn't have walked back from the Bagobo village and taken the boat themselves. And if they had walked to Calinan and obtained a car, Lacson would have found out about it. There weren't so many people in the area that the rental, or borrowing of a car, by two Americans couldn't be discovered easily. Had they hitched a ride Lacson would surely have found that out, too. Few cars traveled the road to Calinan.

Rick took Lacson aside and questioned him while Zircon played the wire over and over again for the Filipino language expert. The major confirmed that he had checked, and was satisfied that the scientists had not obtained a ride back from Calinan from any of the local people. There were no cars to rent, either.

Rick dropped the subject abruptly as Zircon and Gonzalez finished making notes and switched off the recorder.

"Dr. Gonzalez has it," Zircon said with quiet triumph. "The language is difficult, and the headman was far from the microphone, but the sense of what is on the tape is clear."

The boys and Lacson listened closely as the language professor read.

" 'Say nothing, young fool! It is forbidden to speak of the white men. One word that they were here and the wrath of'—I don't know one word here—'will fall on the whole village. Do you want to die? Do you want us all to die? I forbid you to speak on pain of death!' "

"They *were* there!" Scotty exclaimed. "Now maybe we can find out what happened."

"At once," Major Lacson added grimly. "Doctor, what does the missing word sound like?"

The Filipino professor shook his head. "It is a word I've never heard, Major. It doesn't sound like a Bagobo word at all. It's 'shoon' or 'shawn.' Something like that. It's not clear."

"Will you come with us to translate, Doctor?

Juan speaks enough Bagobo to get by, but I'd rather have you for this trip. It may be difficult."

"I'll be glad to. May I have a few moments to change clothing?"

"Of course. I'll take these gentlemen to the hotel and they can change, too. We'll pick you up."

Rick took advantage of the few moments in their hotel room to call Chahda. The Hindu boy answered at once.

"The recording had the answer," Rick told him. "That was a good piece of work, Chahda. We're leaving for the village at once."

"Good. Something I can do?"

"Not right now. I'll call when we get back."

Rick changed swiftly into khaki trail clothes. Their tropical suit trousers had been cleaned overnight and he didn't want to ruin his again.

Outside, Lacson was waiting. Two other command cars had joined him, each one carrying six armed troopers. The three jumped in with the major and went past the university to pick up Dr. Gonzalez.

The caravan broke all speed records getting to Calinan. Juan, the local trooper, got into the last car in line and they roared off to the road's end. This time the Spindrifters were dressed for the hike, and were well sprayed with protection against insects. Each had a hat, and a head net.

The group traveled at good speed. Then, as they emerged from the jungle trail into the clearing that led to the village, a squad of four troopers, under

Juan, broke off from the party and started away at a dogtrot to make a wide circle and approach the village from the opposite side.

The rest walked straight ahead, at a slow pace that would give Juan's squad time to move into position. Rick's party reached the first house in the village and Major Lacson held up his hand. From the far side of the village came Juan's whistle blast.

The major's hand dropped. Troopers with rifles charged into the Bagobo village, scattering among the houses. Lacson drew his pistol and marched straight to the headman's house.

The headman walked to meet them, and his face stiffened as he saw the pistol. He spoke rapidly.

Gonzalez translated. "He wants to know why you come with a weapon pointed at him, and why your men raid his houses."

"Tell him we come as enemies because he lied. The Americans were here. My men search for evidence."

The Filipino professor translated, and the headman made an expressive gesture with his hands. He sat down on a seat made of a split tanguile log and stared straight ahead, obviously intending to maintain a stony silence.

A trooper ran up, waving a tubular object which he handed to the major. Rick saw that it was a high-powered telescope, like one Shannon had owned. His pulse quickened as Scotty removed the protective lens caps and examined the object.

"Shannon's," Scotty stated. "His initials are

stamped on the side, and on the front lens cap."

The headman seemed to wilt.

Another trooper ran up, and he carried a leather quiver that Rick recognized instantly. It also was Shannon's. He knew it well, from their field archery games. In the quiver was the bow, a take-down model, and three dozen arrows.

"Major, what are we going to do?"

For reply, the officer planted himself in front of the headman, his voice harsh. "Tell him, Professor Gonzalez, that we have evidence enough. Unless he has a good explanation, we must believe that his village murdered the Americans. For this, some of his people may pay with their lives."

Dr. Gonzalez translated into Bagobo. For long minutes the headman sat quietly, then he rose to his full height and looked the officer in the eye.

"I am caught between a knife and a spear," Dr. Gonzalez translated. "There is death either way. It is true, the Americans came. We made them welcome. For one evening they stayed. We gave them and their Moro a house to sleep in. Then, after it was dark and we slept, men came. The Americans and the Moro fought, but the men tied them up and carried them away. Then the men said that if one person in my village spoke of this, all would die. The two things we found were not taken because they were in a corner of the hut and were not seen. All else was removed."

"Ask him who the men were and why he didn't fight for the Americans," Lacson directed.

The Filipino language expert posed the question, then translated the reply. "He does not know the men, or their names. He did not fight because it was useless. His people would have died and the Americans would not have been saved."

"Ask him how he knows this."

The Bagobo's reply was terse. "He knows," Gonzalez said. "He will say no more."

Lacson made a sound of disgust. "He means it, too. Look at him."

Rick saw what Lacson meant. The stern face and glittering eyes indicated clearly that the headman would die before he said more about the attackers.

"Does he know where the Americans were taken?" Zircon asked.

"He does not know. The men took them down the trail. Of course some Bagobos followed. But at the road the men put the Americans and their guide into a car and drove away. Apparently there were two or three cars. The Bagobos could not follow."

"Then Shannon, Briotti, and their guide were probably on the boat when it left Davao," Rick said thoughtfully. "But where did the boat go?"

Major Lacson answered. "We don't know. But it is possible we may find out. I've sent out an all-points bulletin asking for information. We may get a lead to its whereabouts."

"We'd better," Scotty said grimly. "Unless someone has seen it, we have the whole Sulu Sea to search!"

CHAPTER V

# Trail of the "Sampaguita"

THE PAL plane droned westward, over the incredible swamps of the Pulangi River, toward Cotabato. Rick watched the sweltering marshland unfold below and caught glimpses of the winding brown river that turned the countryside into a morass. From Colonel Rojas' briefing he knew that the countryside was alive with crocodiles and less pleasant creatures.

In the seat next to Rick, Scotty catnapped. Zircon, across the aisle, was apparently deep in thought.

Rick hoped fervently that they weren't on a wild-goose chase. At Davao they had learned that Briotti, Shannon, and their guide had been kidnaped by some group the Bagobos feared. The reason for the kidnaping could not be guessed. No requests for ransom had been made, and the scientists had no known personal enemies.

Instead of clearing up the mystery, Rick thought, the little they had found had only deepened it. His concern for his missing friends had turned to a deep fear that they might not be found until too late. He

was very conscious of the passage of time. Nearly three weeks had elapsed since the scientists had been forcefully taken from the Bagobo village.

"Think they were taken away on the boat?" Scotty asked suddenly.

Rick turned quickly. Scotty hadn't been napping after all. "We can't be sure, but doesn't it seem likely?"

"It does to me. Of course the kidnapers might have carried them into the interior, but I can't imagine anyone carrying prisoners over those jungle trails. Besides, the boat is missing."

"There are no roads where they could have been taken by car," Rick agreed. "Lacson will try to find the cars that brought them into Davao, but even if he succeeds, it won't tell us much." He changed the subject. "Who could those men have been? They must have been pretty fierce to frighten the Bagobos. That headman doesn't look like a man who scares easily."

"I haven't the glimmer of an idea. Kidnaping two scientists makes no sense at all."

"True. But it must have made sense to the kidnapers."

Scotty didn't comment further. After a while Rick reached under the seat and drew out Shannon's quiver. He had wrapped it in a plastic bag in which his trousers had been returned by the dry cleaner.

The quiver was of soft leather, and made to be slung on the back. It was compartmented for three kinds of arrows. Rick drew one out and saw that it was a blunt type for hunting small game. Next to the

blunt ones were razor-sharp broadhead arrows. The third variety was smaller broadheads. There were a dozen of each.

On the back of the quiver were two zippered pouches. In the first Rick found four new bowstrings and beeswax for waxing them, plus a small file and a whetstone for keeping the broadheads sharp. In the other compartment were two sets of finger cots, or protectors, and a stiff leather arm guard. He slipped a protector, made like sections of glove fingers, on the first three fingers of his right hand. A size too large, but it would do. The arm guard would be all right when he adjusted it.

The bow was in its own special compartment. Rick checked and saw that it was undamaged. It was in two sections, the upper limb made to be fitted into the handle, which was permanently attached to the lower limb. It was an excellent bow, not as heavy as some, but a deadly weapon in the hands of a good shot. It pulled fifty pounds at twenty-eight inches draw.

Rick slipped the quiver back under the seat. He planned to carry it when necessary, so that he, too, would be armed. He was a better than average bowman. It was one of the few sports in which he could nearly always beat Scotty, thanks to his own aptitude and Shannon's teaching. He noticed suddenly that the seat belt light had flashed on. He tightened his belt as the plane descended into Cotabato.

He watched as the city came into view. It was a community of small houses located on a series of

rivers or canals. The surrounding countryside was given over to rice paddies and occasional coconut groves.

This was the first step in the backward trail. Rick had no idea what they might find, but lacking any other course of action they had decided to go back along the *Sampaguita's* route hoping to pick up a clue. They would stay in Cotabato only as long as the plane stopped, just time enough to meet Tony Briotti's friend, Father Murray, an American missionary priest.

As the plane swept in for a landing across the unpaved runway Rick saw the white robes of a priest and knew that Major Lacson's message to the Cotabato constabulary detachment asking that the priest meet the plane had been received.

Father Murray, a lean, tanned, sun-helmeted man of youthful appearance, greeted them as they stepped from the plane. Zircon introduced himself and the boys, and the four retired to the shade of a royal palm to talk.

"Tony and Howard's disappearance was shocking news," Father Murray commented. "You have no new information about what happened to them?"

Zircon told him the little they knew. "We stopped by to see you, hoping you could shed some light on the kidnaping."

The priest shook his head. "I haven't the remotest idea. Their visit here was without incident, except for a robbery attempt. I don't even recall any con-

versation that might be helpful. We talked mostly about their research project."

"You mentioned a robbery?" Rick asked.

"Yes, the first night they were here. Thieves broke into the *convento,* but by good luck, some of my Christian parishioners who live next door were awake. They hurried to the rescue with guns, and the thieves fled before they found where we were sleeping. My people said they were Moros."

Zircon gestured at a group of Moros lounging in the shade of the wooden airport building. "You seem to have quite a few of them here."

Father Murray chuckled. "Indeed we do. This is a Moro province. Both the mayor and governor are Moros. Christians are few."

Rick noted the tight trousers and bolero-type vests that exposed muscular chests. Two of the Moros wore purple velvet caps. The others wore straw hats of intricately woven design that reminded him of helmets.

"Was a Moro guide with our friends?" Zircon asked.

"Yes. He seemed like a respectable young man. I saw little of him, however. He stayed with us, but kept to himself, probably bored with our talk. Did you know that Tony and I were classmates in high school?"

The three hadn't known it. No wonder Tony and Shannon had gone so far out of their way to visit Cotabato.

"That robbery attempt interests me," Scotty said. "Have you ever had such an incident before?"

"Never. The Moros let us alone. Besides, the proverbial church mice would seem rich compared with us. We have literally nothing worth robbing."

The flight was called and the Spindrifters shook hands with Father Murray. He waved as they boarded the plane and prepared to take off.

"Not very helpful," Professor Zircon remarked, "although I'm glad we had a chance to meet Father Murray."

Rick agreed, but added, "Doesn't it strike you as pretty strange coincidence that thieves should try to rob him for the first time, on the night Briotti and Shannon arrived?"

Scotty saw at once what Rick meant. "You think they might not have been thieves? That it might have been a kidnap attempt that failed?"

"It's a possibility," Rick pointed out.

Zircon leaned across the aisle. "Consider the implications of what you're saying, Rick. Cotabato is a long way from Davao. Why would a gang chase our friends across Mindanao?"

"Why were they kidnaped?" Rick retorted.

"Obviously, we don't know. If we accept your idea, do we assume it was the same gang that traveled from Cotabato to Davao? Or, were both groups local people?"

Scotty swallowed. "If they were local people, that has to mean some kind of well-organized syndicate with members in just about every port!"

Rick nodded. He had seen at once the implications of his idea. "It could mean that."

Scotty sank back into his seat. "But whatever it means, it gives no explanation of why Tony and Shannon were kidnaped."

"We'll find the explanation somehow," Rick said, with more assurance than he felt. He added grimly, "We've got to!"

CHAPTER VI

# The Man in the Red Fez

THE famous tropical port of Zamboanga lived up to its reputation as an exotic place. As the taxi carried the Spindrifters from the airport past the waterfront area, Rick saw bright-colored sails mixed with the drab steel of cargo ships. There were many Moros, but Christian Filipinos seemed to be in the majority.

The taxi took them to Bayot's Hotel, a rambling, picturesque affair only two stories high, noted for the best food in the Sulu Sea region. The hotel was almost overgrown with orchids and lush tropical creepers.

As the three checked in, Zircon began asking questions of the man at the desk. "You had Dr. Briotti and Dr. Shannon as guests, I believe?"

"Yes. They stayed here for two days. I read of their disappearance. Incredible."

"Can you tell us if they had any visitors?"

"I recall none."

Rick asked, "Did anyone show unusual interest in them?"

"Not that one could notice. You realize, Americans are not an unusual sight. There are a number who live here."

"Did you know their Moro guide?" Scotty queried.

"I did not know him. I saw him, however. He was an unusual type."

"In what way?" Zircon asked quickly.

"He spoke no Chebucano. When I asked about this he said he was brought up in Tawi Tawi where Chebucano is not spoken. I might have believed this, except for one other thing."

"Yes?" Zircon prompted.

"He spoke excellent Spanish, which also is not spoken on Tawi Tawi.

Rick asked thoughtfully, "You think he might not have been a Moro?"

The man shrugged. "What is a Moro? It is simply a Filipino, of a different religion, and to some extent a different way of life. An educated Moro is like any other educated Filipino. I cannot say if this guide was a Moro. He said he was."

Zircon nodded his understanding. "Do you know if they hired him here?"

"They did. I mean in this city, not in my hotel. I believe they met him on the waterfront."

Rick had seen at once that the man was not a Filipino, and he thought he recognized the accent as Spanish. He asked, "Are you the manager?"

"Yes. I may say, these questions you ask have already been answered by me to Captain Lim of the constabulary. Perhaps he can help you."

"We intend to see him," Zircon replied. "Is his office nearby?"

"No, you will need a car, which I will arrange. He is at the fort, Nuestra Señora Del Pilar. We call it simply Fort Pilar. Now I will show you to your rooms."

Zircon had a room to himself, while Rick and Scotty shared one. The rooms were small, and like all tropic hotel rooms, sparsely furnished but adequate. The three changed clothes quickly and got into their comfortable khaki trousers and shirts. When they returned to the lobby, the manager had a car waiting, with one of the hotel's employees to drive it.

Fort Pilar was a tremendous mass of hand-cut stone many feet thick, pierced for muskets and cannon. It was obviously Spanish in design, and very old. The walls were covered with creepers, and palms had sprung up on what had once been a parade ground. Visible beyond the fort were the clear waters of Basilan Strait.

A sentry took them to Captain Diosdado Lim, who greeted them courteously and scanned the letter they had brought from Colonel Rojas.

"We are at your service," the captain said formally. "This letter makes you more than guests. You are also friends. I welcome you."

"Thank you, Captain," Zircon replied with equal formality. "You knew of our coming from Major Lacson?"

"Yes. We are prepared. We will send your car back and you will ride into town with me. I will

introduce you to the man from whom the boat was hired."

"Any news of the boat?" Rick asked hopefully.

"Not yet. The seas are big and our outposts are few. But we will hope for good fortune."

The captain had a stilted way of speaking, Rick noted. His English was good, but he obviously didn't speak it often. The officer was young and dark, and looked more Chinese than Filipino. He was probably a mestizo, a person of mixed blood.

Zircon launched into questions as soon as they got underway in the captain's sedan. It was soon clear that the officer had little to add to what they already knew. He did say, however, that Azid Hajullah, the Moro guide, had not been a local young man, and that the detachment on Tawi Tawi did not know him. No one, apparently, knew where the guide had come from. It sounded suspicious to Rick. He might have been a plant, to betray the scientists to the unknown kidnapers.

Captain Lim took them to the boatyard operated by José Santos, a fat little Filipino who had once served in the United States Navy. Santos was friendly, and very sad about the scientists. Rick felt he honestly was more disturbed about the two men than about his missing boat.

The *Sampaguita,* he said, was a thirty-foot auxiliary sloop with white hull and red sails. It had once been the private yacht of an American copra planter on Basilan who, alas, had been murdered by his Moro field hands. Santos had not known the Moro

guide, and had noticed nothing unusual about him. And there the interview ended. Rick shook his head. They were certainly not making progress.

"Is there anything I can do?" Captain Lim asked.

"I'm afraid not," Zircon replied. "Thank you, Captain. If you don't mind, we'll walk back to the hotel. It's only a short distance. And I'm sure the boys want to see this part of town. I do."

"Of course. Anyway, you must be my guests for dinner at the hotel. At ten o'clock."

"We'll be delighted," Zircon answered. "Will you go back to the fort now?"

"No. If you want me I will be at home, behind the hotel. It is the small white cottage."

The three waved good-by, then turned toward the teeming wharf area, which was also the town's market place. Just beyond the breakwater, native outrigger boats with bright-colored sails in stripes and patterns swept by in a kind of convoy.

Scotty asked an elderly Filipino who was watching, "Sir, may I ask the name of that kind of boat?"

The Filipino smiled. "Colorful, yes? They are vintas. Moro boats from Sulu Sea. They come to sell fish."

Scotty thanked him and the three walked slowly through the market place. By unspoken consent they said nothing about their problem. All of them knew they had reached a dead end, and none knew where to go from this point.

They stopped once to watch two fighting cocks sparring with shielded spurs. A few yards away they

stopped once more, at a fruit vendor's stall. Many of the fruits were new and strange. They took a moment to learn about them from the vendor. There were mangosteens, not related to mangoes, with red husks and pure-white fruit; lanzones that looked like clusters of brown plums; foul-smelling but tasty durian; star apples, and several varieties of banana, none of which looked like the Central American variety.

Rick tried a mangosteen. He passed sections of the white fruit to Scotty and Zircon, then bit into his. It was cool, tart, and delicious, unlike anything he had ever tasted before. He decided he could become a mangosteen addict in no time and started back to buy a bagful. A low comment from Scotty stopped him.

"We've picked up a friend. He's been with us for the past ten minutes."

"Let's stop at this stand and look at the baskets," Zircon invited casually.

They did so, and pretended great interest in the huge variety of woven ware while Scotty maneuvered to look back the way they had come. Rick saw his pal's face change, then Scotty fingered a basket and used it as a cover while talking.

"It's nice to find a familiar face in a strange place," Scotty said. "Believe it or not, it's the man in the red fez who trailed us in Manila!"

"Are you certain?" Zircon asked swiftly.

"Yes. It isn't just the fez, it's the face. Besides, he's wearing the same clothes."

Zircon's normally loud voice dropped to a whisper. "Lay a plan, Scotty. We'll mousetrap him. I have a few questions I'd like to ask."

"All right. Let's move on and look for a place. This is too crowded."

They sauntered on, elaborately casual, stopping now and then to examine goods in an open market stall or to marvel at the colors of fish offered for sale. Rick wondered about the man in the red fez. Since he had trailed them in Manila, and had come all the way to Zamboanga, his interest in them must be linked to the missing scientists. Maybe, if the man would talk, they could finally learn something of value!

Rick kept his eyes open, watching for a likely place to set a trap. He saw that the market place ended in an open park that ran along both sides of the street leading from the wharves into town. Up the street, where the park ended, he saw a big warehouse marked with the name MANUAL WEE SIT & CO.

"That shed is the best bet," Scotty said softly. "Let's step it up a little, walk to the end of the warehouse, then go around the corner. Look for a doorway in which we can wait for him."

The three walked faster, but only as tourists might do who had left an interesting area and wanted to go elsewhere. They passed the end of the warehouse and rounded the corner. There was an open shed-type door there, and seated in front of it on a nail keg was an elderly Chinese, smoking his water pipe

*The man's back was tattooed with a strange design*

and getting the afternoon sun. He didn't look up at the three Americans.

"Step in the doorway," Scotty said swiftly. "The old man must be dreaming about something. He won't bother us."

It was cool and dim in the warehouse. Rick saw flour barrels and case after case of canned food, many with American brand names.

Scotty took a position just inside the door where he could watch through the opening. In a moment he tensed, ready to spring. Rick saw the Moro's shadow just as Scotty leaped.

Rick ran out, Zircon right behind him, in time to see Scotty confront the Moro. The man's eyes widened. His hand flashed to his sash with the speed of a striking snake and emerged with a short dagger, a vicious thing with a wavy blade like a kris.

Scotty didn't hesitate. He let go with a punch that had his powerful shoulder behind it. But fast as Scotty was, the Moro dodged, then lunged forward with the knife.

Rick sprang forward to help, but Scotty was ready. The boy stepped to one side and in the same motion grabbed the wrist that held the knife. He doubled the Moro's arm back, twisting at the same time. Rick ran to pick up the knife as it fell.

The Moro hadn't given up. He kicked out, his foot catching Scotty under the armpit, breaking his hold. The Moro broke free and started to run.

"Get him!" Zircon bellowed.

Scotty dove, both hands outstretched, with Rick

right behind him. One of Scotty's hands caught the Moro by shirt and jacket, stopping him long enough for the other hand to get a grip, too. The Moro plunged wildly and the clothing ripped loose. By then Rick was in position. He delivered a judo chop to the side of the Moro's neck. The man slumped to the ground, the red fez dropping into the dust.

For the first time Rick got a look at the Moro's back, where Scotty's frantic grab had bared it. The man was tattooed with a strange design. A Moro kris was crossed with a barong, and both weapons dripped blood. Above the knives, in bright blue ink, was a symbol composed of a short horizontal line from which three vertical lines rose. The middle vertical line was slightly taller than the other two.

Sound smote Rick's ears. He turned swiftly and saw that the old Chinese had come to frightened life. The old man's eyes were open wide, staring at the tattooed design. His mouth was open, and he was wailing at such high pitch that Rick flinched.

Then the old man babbled something and ran like one possessed into the shelter of the warehouse.

Scotty stared after him in amazement. "What got into him? He ran as though he'd got a sudden look at the devil!"

Zircon hauled the groggy Moro to his feet. "Possibly he did," the physicist stated. He pointed to the symbol. "This looks like a Chinese character. Perhaps the old man recognized it."

Swift excitement ran through Rick. "If he did, maybe we've just hit a jackpot!"

CHAPTER VII

# News at Zamboanga

A CROWD of Filipinos, including several Moros, was attracted by the brief fight. A few departed in a hurry after one look at the captive's bared back. The rest remained at a distance, talking in the local dialect. Rick and Scotty kept alert, ready to act if anyone tried to free the captive. Scotty had tied him up with his own sash. He was seated against the warehouse wall, sullen and silent.

Zircon emerged from the warehouse. "I got the captain on the phone. He's on his way."

Apparently the captain wasted no time. In less than two minutes his sedan skidded to a stop and he jumped out. "What is going on?"

"He was trailing us," Zircon said, indicating the Moro. "He also trailed us in Manila. We thought it best to try to find out why. Incidentally, an old Chinese is hiding in the warehouse. He ran when he saw the symbol on the Moro's back. It may be a Chinese character of some sort."

Captain Lim inspected the design and nodded.

"It is. I know Chinese. Those lines form the word for 'shan,' which in English is mountain. But I have no idea why it should frighten the old man. I will ask."

The three Spindrifters looked at each other, excitement on all of their faces. "Now we know the word the headman at the Bagobo village used," Zircon commented. "Shan, or mountain."

They waited, keeping close watch on the crowd until Captain Lim emerged. The officer shook his head. "I could get little from him. He fears the 'Pirates of Shan,' of which he says this Moro is a member. He would not elaborate."

"Who are the Pirates of Shan?" Rick demanded.

"I don't know. The phrase is new to me."

"Silly," Scotty muttered. "Piracy has been dead for a century."

"Not so," Lim corrected. "Excuse me, but piracy is not uncommon, especially along the China coast and in the islands south of Borneo. Only a short time ago Chinese pirates captured an ocean-going cargo ship."

"He's right," Zircon confirmed. "I've read of piracy quite recently. And don't forget, the Moros of Sulu were a pirate nation until Spanish gunboats and troops cut down the activity, and the Americans finally stopped it. Piracy is not new to this part of the world."

Scotty helped Captain Lim put the Moro in the sedan. "I will be surprised if we get much from this man," Lim said, "but we can try at the Fort. I will see you at dinner tonight."

The crowd dispersed and the three walked back to the hotel. Zircon left them in the lobby. "Be back shortly. I'm going to wire Okola about pirates."

In their room the boys took off their outer clothes and sprawled on their beds in shorts. "This is shaping up to something big," Rick said thoughtfully.

"I know what you mean. Robbery at Cotabato, kidnaping at Davao, and now this. It must tie together. Apparently some people have heard of the Pirates of Shan, but most haven't."

"Strange the constabulary doesn't know about them. But I suppose it's natural enough in an area like this, with only a few troops and millions of square miles. But why would pirates take our friends?"

Scotty didn't even try to guess. "Isn't Chahda due pretty soon?" he asked.

"Not until eight." Rick had given Chahda details of the findings at the Bagobo village and the Hindu boy had decided to spend another day in Davao. He would join them at Bayot's.

"At least we're collecting some pieces that add up," Rick said with more satisfaction than he had felt in a long time. He closed his eyes and began to review the information they had obtained. Presently he drifted off to sleep.

Scotty woke Rick some time later. "Wake up! Chahda's here."

Rick sat up, blinking. "What time is it?"

"After nine. We're due at dinner shortly."

"Where's Chahda?"

"Getting cleaned up. He'll be back."

"Where's Zircon?"

"Gone out. He had a call from the hotel desk."

Rick got into the shower for a quick wake-up bath. By the time he was dressed Zircon had returned, a yellow sheet of paper in his hands. Chahda arrived a moment later.

"All here," Chahda said. "Good. Now I tell. You know who got our friends? Pirates!"

Rick stared at him in awe. "How did you find that out?"

"Word you said, one that scared Bagobos. I said it too, in few places at Davao. I try different ways to say, and I must have said it good one time. Filipino snapped at me to shut up, because word no good. But did Chahda shut up?"

"Never," Scotty said emphatically.

"Is true. Anyway, Filipino whispers to me about Pirates of Shan. He knows little. Only that they kill quick, and no one knows who is a pirate and who is not. Not many have heard of them."

"Some have," Zircon interjected. He waved the paper. "Okola replied by return wire. Listen."

The big physicist read: " 'Pirates of Shan date back to seventeenth century. Originally Chinese Moslems, later joined by Filipino Moslems and some Malays. Most active around 1800. Shan is from Chinese word for mountain, but no one knows what mountain. Some believe Shan located near Borneo

coast. Some mention pirates in action against Japanese during World War Two. No record since. Regret no more available.' "

"Okola certainly knows his history," Scotty stated. "Well, at least we have a tag to hang on the enemy. The kidnapers were pirates."

Zircon agreed. "Being trailed by one certainly seems to tie up with Tony and Howard's disappearance. And speaking of kidnapers, that Filipino boy, Elpidio Torres was kidnaped. His folks now have a ransom demand." He held out a recent newspaper.

Rick scanned the front-page story. "Think there might be a connection?"

"Possible, I suppose, but consider the distance. According to the story, a ransom of one million pesos is to be left on the Batangas coast, south of Manila."

Scotty whistled. "Half a million bucks! That would make piracy worth while!"

"Yes, but Manila isn't the Sulu Sea," Zircon pointed out. "Also, there has been no ransom demand for Tony and Howard. They weren't taken until some time after the Torres boy vanished."

"What we do now?" Chahda asked.

"We eat, with the local constabulary chief," Rick replied. "Think it's safe to join us?"

Chahda grinned. "Safe or no, I go. I hungry."

Rick and Scotty were hungry, too. The Spanish-Filipino custom of dining late did not appeal to them. But as it developed, dinner was worth waiting

for. Captain Lim was apparently a gourmet. He had ordered soup made of smoked oysters from Palawan Island, a second course of delicate butterfly fish fillets in a marvelous sauce of fresh coconut, a main course of breasts of chicken boiled in coconut milk, a salad of hearts of palm, a Spanish dessert called *lecheflan,* which was a kind of custard swimming in caramel sauce, and thick, aromatic Batangas coffee.

Rick and Scotty ate until they could hold no more, and Chahda groaned, "Once I read words 'stuffed like Christmas goose.' This now fits me."

Zircon lighted a Manila cigar and sat back in his chair, a look of pure contentment on his face. "A wonderful meal, Captain. Thank you, for all of us. I haven't dined so well in months."

Captain Lim beamed his pleasure. "Then you may forgive me for failing with the Moro. He would say nothing. I have no legal grounds on which to hold him for long, either."

Zircon nodded his understanding. "We expected nothing, but we had to try. Chahda, tell Captain Lim what you found out in Davao, and I'll give him Okola's message."

The exchange of information completed, Zircon changed the subject. The scientist knew they were in need of something to take their minds off the search for a while, and he encouraged Captain Lim to tell them about Zamboanga and its long and sometimes bloody history.

The officer turned out to be an entertaining story-

teller. He kept them laughing, or on the edges of their chairs until after midnight. Then he began teaching them the famous song that goes:

*The monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga!*
*The monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga!*
*The monkeys have no tails;*
*They were bitten off by whales!*
*Oh, the monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga!*

The Spindrifters had just gotten into the swing of the rollicking melody when a sergeant came in with a message for the captain. Lim tore the envelope open and read rapidly. Then he slapped his hand on the table. "Good! This is from Major Lacson. A boat answering the description of the *Sampaguita* was seen about four days after the kidnaping, heading south of the island of Bulan. A fisherman saw it."

Rick's heart leaped with sudden hope and excitement. "Where is Bulan?"

"Across the Strait from here is Basilan. Bulan is a small island south of it."

Scotty said with relief, "At least we know now which way they're heading."

"And we know what to do next," Zircon added.

"We go after it!" Chahda concluded grimly.

CHAPTER VIII

# The "Swift Arrow"

José Santos' boatyard was not large, but to Rick it seemed as though the Filipino boatman had a sample of every kind of craft from a rowboat to a Chinese junk.

"We want a boat," Zircon stated. "Not a sailboat. That would be too slow. We want something reasonably fast, and with enough room for comfort. We may have to live aboard for some time."

Santos nodded. "You no care how big?"

"There are four of us to handle it."

"Plenty," Santos said. "No more help needed for my *Swift Arrow*. See over there?"

Rick's quick eyes caught the lines of the craft first. He exclaimed, "Well, I'll be a galloping grampus! It's a torpedo boat!"

"Yes," Santos confirmed, beaming. "Motor torpedo boat. I convert her myself. Come see."

Chahda asked, "Rick, what is torpedo boat?"

"It's a very fast, light boat, designed to launch torpedoes at bigger ships. It depends on speed for

safety. This one must be left over from World War Two."

"Plenty old," Chahda said doubtfully.

Scotty chuckled. "Age doesn't mean anything to a boat if it's well built and well taken care of. The MTB's were light, but very well built. You'll see."

Zircon was well acquainted with boats and Rick and Scotty were not novices. They went over the *Swift Arrow* from stem to stern, missing nothing. The armament had been removed and the original gasoline engines were gone. Instead, it was operated by a pair of marine diesels. Santos claimed that the engines were in excellent shape and that the boat could make a speed of twenty knots even in rough water, with a top speed of nearly thirty knots in calm seas.

Scotty checked the engines and confirmed the claim. They ran like Swiss watches. The boat was fully equipped, even to searchlight, horn, and a brass saluting cannon that fired blanks much like shotgun shells.

"We'll take it," Zircon announced. "Fill it with fuel and water, put charts for the whole area aboard with navigation instruments, and we'll be back in an hour and get under way." He hastily signed a traveler's check for the advance fee, then the four hiked back to the hotel and got down to business.

They made up a provision list, arranged to rent bed linens and towels from the hotel, found out where ammunition could be purchased, packed their bags, and prepared to check out.

Chahda spoke up. "Where you go first? Jolo, maybe? Suppose I go ahead on PAL, and snoop round a little. Meet you there."

Zircon considered. "I suppose Jolo is the logical destination. It's the capital of the Sulu Archipelago. We'll refuel there, probably by tomorrow morning."

Rick thought it was probably a good idea for Chahda to go ahead. He could use his Indian contacts to pick up any information that might be available. It would save them time. "I'm for it," he said.

Zircon made sure Chahda had ample funds, then the three bade him good-by for the time being and started on their shopping tour.

Within the promised hour they had their luggage and provisions loaded aboard and were prepared to cast off. Santos had the boat ready, even to putting in a box of shells for the saluting cannon.

Scotty and Rick cast off while Zircon sent the MTB smoothly away from the dock, through the breakwater and into Basilan Strait. Then Scotty took over, while Zircon checked the first leg of their course. On the charts Santos had given them the routes between principal ports were clearly marked. Zircon found the route from Zamboanga to Jolo and gave Scotty the first compass setting.

Scotty opened the throttle wide. The *Swift Arrow* responded instantly, planing along at a fast clip. Zircon took sightings with the pelorus, then calculated his readings.

Rick watched with interest, anxious to find out what speed they were making. Finally the big physi-

cist looked up, grinning. "We've picked a champion. Twenty-eight knots!"

It was far below the original speed of the craft, but probably far above the speed of anything else in the Sulu Sea. Rick was satisfied. "I'm going below. I'll store the chow, then relieve Scotty."

In a short time, taking turns at the helm, the three had everything stowed and bunks ready for occupancy. Zircon and Scotty had broken out the newly purchased ammunition and loaded their weapons. Rick hung Shannon's quiver on a hook near the bunks.

The *Swift Arrow* sped steadily on. Basilan dropped astern as they negotiated the countless islands of the Pilas Group. Two islands formed a narrow channel ahead, Rick saw, as he took the wheel from Scotty. Once through the channel they would be in open water, nothing between them and Jolo but the Sulu Sea.

Scotty walked to the bow, to check on the readiness of the anchor. In a moment he returned and joined Rick. "Must be good fishing country. Lots of vintas in the channel ahead."

Rick had noticed. "Must be two dozen." Between the islands, the channel was dotted with red, purple, green, and brown sails. As the MTB drew nearer, Rick throttled down a little. He was already traveling at cruising speed, considerably less than top speed, but he didn't want to take a chance of ramming one of the Moro craft.

The distance closed rapidly, and Zircon pointed

out that the vintas seemed to be spreading in a line across the channel, only a boat's length between them. "Slow down more," he advised. "They may be hauling a net or something."

Rick did so, keeping a careful eye out for net floats. "Not much room to go through. I'll toot the horn."

He gave the horn a long blast. The Moros paid no attention. Apparently fishing boats had the right of way, and they didn't intend to move. The *Swift Arrow* was close enough now, so he could see the triangular masts and the booms of the lateen sails. He could make out the crews, too. The boats seemed to be crowded with men.

"They're not going to make way!" Zircon exclaimed. The MTB was already well within the channel.

"They're intercepting us front and rear!" Scotty yelled. "Look!"

The vintas on the ends of the line had moved rapidly, and the rest followed. The MTB would soon be surrounded! Rick spun the wheel and turned the big boat nearly in its own length, heeling far over. In the same instant a rifle slug splintered wood on the cabin roof overhead.

Scotty jumped for his rifle and started firing. Zircon hauled the automatic from his belt and yelled, "Gun it, Rick!"

Rick didn't need the advice. He straightened the MTB out and rammed the throttles to full speed. Slugs smacked into the hull or blossomed as stars

on the glass of the pilothouse. He made the MTB dance through the water at top speed. His evasive action made it hard for Scotty and Zircon to fire accurately and they stopped.

In a few moments they were out of range of the vintas. Zircon called out a new course that would take them through another channel more to the west. It was longer, but safer.

The three remained silent while Rick got on the new course. Attack by vintas in open water was about the last thing any of them had expected.

Finally Zircon slipped the clip from his pistol, ejected the shell in the chamber, and reloaded. The scientist said severely, "Mr. Scott, on a certain occasion at Zamboanga yesterday, you were heard to make a remark to the effect that piracy has been dead for a century. In view of our recent experience, I believe it is only fair to offer an opportunity to correct the record."

Scotty bowed ceremoniously. "You are most kind, Dr. Zircon. It would perhaps be more accurate to state that piracy has not been dead for a century. My conclusion is entirely empirical, of course, but observation leads me to conclude that the vintas in the channel may indeed have been manned by pirates."

"Handsomely said, Mr. Scott. You have a comment, Mr. Brant?"

"I concur," Rick said gravely. "Would you care to hazard a surmise about the identity of these putative pirates?"

Zircon stroked his chin thoughtfully. "We had no opportunity to remove shirts and examine backs. Yet I must venture the opinion that the men in the vintas carry the mark of the mountain."

"And why did they lay in wait for us?" Scotty asked.

"My surmise," Zircon boomed, "is that we are doing exactly the right thing. They fear our ultimate success. Ergo, they try to remove us."

Rick had to grin. "I've always wanted to hear someone say 'ergo.' But how did they know we were coming?"

Zircon shook his head. "The islands in the vicinity are too small to have radio or telephone. However, we've not been too careful about our plans. The waiter last night, or a houseboy outside our hotel door could have overheard us, and a vinta could have gotten here in time to lay a trap."

"We'll probably never be sure," Rick said. Suddenly he grinned widely. He had the feeling they were making progress.

"At least," he stated, "we've met the Pirates of Shan!"

CHAPTER IX

# The Moro Knives

RICK walked to the bow as the *Swift Arrow* approached the harbor of Jolo in the early-morning hours. He used Shannon's long glass to inspect some curious-looking houses to the west of the harbor entrance. The glass showed him they were built on stilts over the water, and connected by a series of bamboo walkways.

Zircon joined him and borrowed the glass for a look. "Samal village," he explained. "I've never seen one, but I spent last night reading a pocket guide I picked up at Bayot's. The Samals are Moros, noted as fishermen."

"And pirates?"

Zircon smiled. "The book didn't say."

In spite of the primitive Samal village, the dock and the city were fairly modern. As Scotty took the *Swift Arrow* closer, Rick and Zircon looked for a place to tie up.

Chahda saved them the trouble. The Hindu boy appeared on a bale of abacá and waved both arms

until they saw him, then he motioned them to the left and ran down the dock. Scotty swung the MTB past the dock and saw a smaller dock where a few pleasure boats were tied up. In a moment they were alongside. Chahda caught the line Rick threw and hauled the bow in.

The Hindu boy jumped aboard as soon as they were tied up. "You early," he greeted them.

"We could have been here last night, but we decided to take it easy and not risk running into vintas and things in the darkness," Rick replied.

"It was a fine trip," Scotty added. "We met some friends."

"Friends? You meaning purposies?"

"Porpoises," Rick corrected. "Not exactly. He means pirates. They took some shots at us."

Chahda's wide eyes took in the bullet holes. He muttered to himself in Hindi.

"We were a little surprised," Zircon added. "We're not even sure they were especially after us. They might have been waiting for any craft that came along. We can't imagine how they could communicate so rapidly, unless they had advance notice of our plans."

Chahda shook his head. "Smarter than you think, these Moros. Sometimes use strange way to get letter far distances. I amazed."

"What is this strange way?" Zircon asked.

"You know there plenty parrots here? Moros teach birds to talk, then tell message and say, 'Okay bird. You go now and tell Charlie.'"

Rick and Zircon stared at the Hindu boy incredulously, but Scotty had been the object of Chahda's humor often enough to recognize it first. He grabbed the lithe brown boy and held him out over the muddy harbor waters in spite of his struggles.

"Take it back!" he demanded.

"Is took!" Chahda yelled. He straightened his shirt as Scotty hauled him in again, and looked at the dark-haired boy accusingly. "That plenty good yarn. You just scooptical, that's all."

"Skeptical," Rick corrected.

"Is so. Anyway, if parrots don't fly, pigeons do. Sometimes my Indian friends use pigeons for messages to islands with no radios. So why not pirates?"

Why not? Rick thought Chahda very likely had the answer. Carrier pigeons would serve a useful purpose in a remote place like the Sulu Sea, and one could have reached the channel from Zamboanga after they departed.

"Let's go into the cabin," Zircon suggested. The boys followed him and took seats on the bunks, waiting expectantly.

"Let's start with Chahda. Learn anything?"

The Hindu boy nodded. "Little. Some peoples here think pirates took plenty boats now missing. Not many hear of pirates, but more than in Davao."

"Any guesses on their hide-out?" Scotty asked.

"None good. Some say far to south, maybe near Tawi Tawi. Plenty small islands, no people."

"I agree," Zircon added. "I've studied the chart, and that seems to be the most likely area. We can go

right on to Borneo, if need be. It's only about a hundred and twenty-five miles from Jolo. It's even possible the pirate hangout is off the Borneo coast."

Rick spoke up. "I've been thinking about that pirate attack. Yesterday we got away through sheer speed, right? Well, word about our speed will spread. Now, we don't want the pirates to give up because our boat is too fast for them. We want them to think they can attack us successfully, because the attacks are our best clue to whether or not we're on the right track."

He believed that no further attack would mean they were getting cold, while increasing attacks would mean they were getting warm, to use the old game terms. The closer to the pirate stronghold, the more determined the attacks would be, particularly if the pirates saw a chance of taking over the MTB.

Scotty saw what Rick had in mind. "You mean we have to convince them we're no longer fast?"

"That's it. There must be pirate spies here in Jolo. Why not plant a story that one engine is bad?"

"Very good!" Zircon exclaimed. "We could do it by trying, very publicly, to get some engine part. Which one, Scotty? It has to be one we won't be able to get."

Scotty thought it over while the others watched him anxiously, then suddenly he snapped his fingers. "Got it. A new timing gear. I'll be surprised if there's one nearer than Manila. I can juggle the spark, so the engine sounds as though the timing were off. That will make it more convincing."

Zircon rose. "We'll do it. Chahda, you've seen the town. Can you stand by while the rest of us make a quick trip? We must see the constabulary, and I have a purchase to make."

"Gladly do," Chahda assented. "First I go and get suitcase. This time I stay with you until we find our friends."

The Hindu boy got his luggage and a paper-wrapped package from the dock guard's hut. Rick and the others left him to guard the *Swift Arrow.*

The main street of Jolo started only a few hundred feet from the dock area. Wooden stores and houses predominated, but there were a few of ancient stone. The people were almost entirely Moro, with only a sprinkling of Christian Filipinos. They saw no other Americans, although a few lived in the town.

"Wish we had more time here," Zircon remarked. "After all, Jolo is the seat of Islam in this part of the world."

"Of what?" Scotty asked.

"Islam is the proper name for the religion we called Mohammedanism. Moros are Moslems. The name is from the old Spanish for Moor. This island—my guidebook says—is the home of the Sultan of Sulu, the spiritual head of Islam in the Philippines."

Rick noted a strange pair of men making their way down the street. Their skins were brown, but their bushy hair was an odd orange red. They walked with knees bent sharply, as though on the verge of sitting down. Their legs were spindly, the knees prominent.

"Bajaus," Zircon said. "Sea gypsies. I recognize them from my talks with Tony. He was interested in studying them. They spend their entire lives in vintas, usually in a squatting position. That's the reason for the odd posture. They have trouble standing upright. Their hair is that color because sun and salt have bleached it."

A pair of Moros went by, carrying a bamboo pole from which a dozen small sharks were suspended by the gills. Rick saw that the fins had been cut off, probably bought by some Chinese for making soup.

There were shops everywhere. Zircon looked them over carefully. "Watch for a hardware store," he requested.

They reached the constabulary office before finding a hardware store, however. Rick and Scotty decided to wait outside and enjoy the interesting street scene while Zircon checked in.

The boys noted that many Moros were armed, with krises or barongs in fancy sheaths. Some had small daggers with pistol-grip type handles tucked in their sashes. While Rick and Scotty watched, they were on the alert for possible enemies, but so many Moros eyed them curiously, it was hard to pick out any one of them as being suspicious. Just the same, both had the feeling of being tailed.

Zircon emerged shortly. "Lacson and Lim have both sent messages transmitting what details we have. All detachments in the area have been alerted to watch for the *Sampaguita.* Now they'll also be told to keep a lookout for pirates or information con-

cerning them. Our report on the attack has gone to Manila already. They wasted no time."

The Spindrifters resumed their hike up the main street and came upon a hard-goods store. Inside, Zircon finally succeeded in making his wants known. To the boys' amazement, he bought ten dozen boxes of ordinary household tacks! He refused to tell them what the tacks were for.

"He's going to nail down the facts," Rick suggested.

Scotty shook his head. "Nope. He thinks we have a sailboat, and anyone knows sailboats have to tack into the wind."

Zircon merely grinned and said nothing.

Visits to four ship supply stores followed. Zircon expressed amazement at the top of his voice that no timing gear was available. He bemoaned the loss of one engine unless the gear was forthcoming. He sounded pretty convincing.

"We've got it made," Scotty said with satisfaction as the three walked back to the dock. "Did you know we have a tail? He's good, too. I had trouble spotting him. You can bet he heard the professor's sad story, which means the vintas will know about our 'bad engine.' "

The *Swift Arrow* was in sight now. Rick stared for a heartbeat, then broke into a run. "Come on! Chahda's fighting with someone!"

Rick had seen the Hindu boy dance into sight on the stern of the boat, then lunge behind the pilot house again, a long knife in his hand.

The three pounded down the dock and leaped aboard, then stopped short at the sight on the stern. Chahda had suspended a large bunch of bananas from a convenient hook and was methodically slicing it to pieces with a long Moro knife in each hand.

Rick exploded, "What in the name of an Indian idiot are you doing?"

Chahda paused in his dancing attack to welcome them aboard with a grin. "I get in shape. You like my weapons?"

Rick and the others examined them with considerable interest. One was a barong, with a heavy blade about two feet long. The blade curved along the bottom, or cutting edge, but was nearly straight along the top, which was nearly a quarter of an inch thick. The second weapon was a kris, about the same length, but with two cutting edges, both of which were wavy in typical kris fashion. The kris was more swordlike, but it was a cutting weapon not used for stabbing.

Chahda proceeded to give a demonstration, a blade in each hand. Rick was amazed to see that he used both hands equally well.

"Why all the sudden interest in weapons?" Rick asked.

Chahda sent the remainder of the bananas flying with one cut. "We go after scientists, yes? We find them, too. But, Rick, don't think we get them back without one big fight!"

CHAPTER X

# South of Sulu

THE *Swift Arrow* rounded the western end of Jolo and headed south toward the Tapul islands. On the south side of the group was the island of Siasi where Zircon planned to top off the fuel tanks and check in with the constabulary again.

The four set up watches, two to a watch, four hours at a stretch. They settled down to a long search. At Siasi they would be at the center of the Sulu Archipelago, and would leave the Sulu Sea behind and enter the Celebes Sea. The sun blazed down from nearly overhead at noon until the caulking in the deck bubbled and the sea seemed to steam. They were less than six degrees above the Equator now.

Vintas dotted the waters close to the islands, but they were apparently peaceful Samal fishermen. There was no sign of a pirate fleet.

"I doubt that the pirates will bother us in these waters," Zircon remarked. "Too close to islands with

civilization on them. We can look for trouble in the more open waters to the south."

"They bothered us close to Zamboanga," Rick pointed out.

"True. However, I suspect it was simply a quick try at getting us before we were well under way. I'm rather flattered, as a matter of fact. Of course they know what we're after. It was in the Manila papers. But they must realize we won't quit until we find Tony and Howard, and they must be afraid we'll succeed. Otherwise, why attack us?"

Rick saw the sense of Zircon's reasoning. "Then this mysterious island may not be hard to find, at least for anyone who's really determined."

"That's my guess. Anyway, I think we may be attacked when we accidentally start toward their base. And it will be an accident, since we have no clues."

At Siasi the constabulary had no further information of value, except that the government was showing deep interest and concern about the pirates. The searchers topped off the fuel and water tanks, and anchored for the night in the protected harbor. At dawn they hauled anchor and rounded Siasi.

Zircon laid a course that took them south-southwest toward the Kinapusan Islands and cautioned all hands to be on the alert. By noon they had crossed Taapan Passage.

Chahda and Rick were in the galley, cooking hamburgers for lunch. Chahda was explaining the technique of using the Moro blades.

"Must remember, knife is not just a thing. Is part

of your arm. Is sharp part that just makes arm longer. You no swing knife. You swing arm, like trying to cut with end of finger. Okay?"

"I get it," Rick agreed. "Don't think of the knife as something separate. Think of it as part of your own body."

"Yes," Chahda assented. "Next, balancing of knife is important. If is good, is like part of you. If is bad, can never be part of you. Moro knives well-balanced. You see . . ."

Chahda never got a chance to finish.

"All hands on deck! Pirates!" Scotty yelled.

Rick and Chahda piled out of the galley at top speed, Rick grabbing Shannon's quiver from its hook as he passed. He quickly put the bow together and strung it, then swung the quiver to his back as he reached the deck.

Ahead was a line of vintas, already curving in an arc to trap them. Rick glanced behind and saw that other Moro craft were closing in. They would be surrounded this time, unless they chose to give up their pretense of a crippled engine.

"Chahda!" Scotty called. "Take the wheel so I can use my rifle."

The Hindu boy checked to be sure his knives were at hand, then took over from Scotty, who laid out extra clips and got ready to fire.

Zircon had extra clips for his pistol close at hand. He was watching the vintas through the long glass.

Rick put on his arm guard and finger protectors. Since the vintas were still out of bowshot he took a

*"All hands on deck! Pirates!"*

moment to beeswax his string. Then he took a small broadhead arrow from the quiver, nocked it, and drew a few times to unlimber his muscles, being careful not to let the string snap out of his fingers.

"What now?" he asked.

"We'll go straight ahead," Zircon answered. "Chahda, use nearly full speed on one engine. Have the second engine idling, but don't use it unless we get into serious trouble. Notice that the vintas ahead of us are running before the wind? If we can get through the line we'll have the weather gauge of them. In other words, they'll have to tack with the wind against them. We'll be able to get free easily on one engine."

Scotty pointed to a gap between a vinta with a solid purple sail and one with blue-and-white stripes. "There's a hole to go through, Chahda."

Rick saw that the vintas ahead were closing in. The Moro craft would be two deep by the time the MTB reached them. He loosened his quiver and made sure the arrows were free. He might have to shoot pretty fast.

His senses were unnaturally alert. The water was bluer than blue and the small patches of fair-weather clouds seemed brilliantly white. The sails on the Moro craft were gaudy, their crews properly fierce and picturesque. He was detached from the reality of the scene, as though this were some movie he was watching.

Zircon brought him back to reality with a jolt. "Pick off the helmsmen first!"

Rick could hear yells now, as the Moros saw that the *Swift Arrow* was almost within reach. He ran to the foredeck and knelt on one knee, arrow nocked and ready. Scotty climbed to the top of the pilothouse and lay prone, rifle thrust out.

The pirate yells were louder now, and some Moros brandished barongs or krises while others waved rifles. Rick suppressed a shudder. If the pirates got on board with those knives . . .

The pirate fleet opened fire. A slug whined off a ventilator cowl a foot from Rick's head, but he forced himself to wait. It was still a little far for bow shooting. It was not too far for Scotty, however. Rick heard the sharp crack of his pal's rifle, and saw a Moro helmsman slump over in the nearest vinta. The craft sheered off. Another Moro jumped to take the helmsman's place and Scotty's second shot splintered the rudder handle in his hands.

A vinta closed to within twenty yards, an easy bowshot. Rick mentally timed the rise and fall of the craft on the swell. Then, as it broached slightly, he had a clear shot at the helmsman. Kneeling, he drew swiftly and loosed. The shaft caught the Moro in the hollow of the shoulder and pinned him back against the stern transom.

Rick reached for another arrow in the smooth rhythm Shannon had taught him, but the rhythm was abruptly shattered by a sudden blast almost in his ear! He whirled swiftly to meet the new threat, just in time to see Zircon open the breech of the saluting cannon and extract a smoking shell.

For an instant Rick wondered if the scientist had taken leave of his senses. He saw Zircon ram home a blank cartridge and close the breech.

Then, suddenly, the action made sense to Rick. For Zircon upended the cannon muzzle and poured in a box of tacks!

The scientist depressed the muzzle, sighted calmly, and pulled the lanyard. A swath of tacks spewed into the bow of the nearest vinta bringing a chorus of pirate yells. The craft swerved away.

Shouting with delight at the scientist's ingenuity, Rick jumped to Zircon's side. Working together, they fired box after box of tacks, and saw the vintas slowly clear the way.

The Moros could face cold steel or hot lead without a qualm, but the fierce, stinging tacks were too much, and too unexpected. They failed to press the attack at the crucial moment and the *Swift Arrow* slipped through the line.

As Zircon had predicted, one engine gave them enough speed to get clear, once the Moros had lost the advantage of a favorable wind. Scotty fired a few more shots at the vintas within range, then dropped to the deck. The fight was over.

The four gathered in the pilothouse and the three boys stared at Zircon with mixed admiration and amusement.

"It's nothing," the big physicist said modestly. "You see, in my lifetime I have been an avid reader. At one time, while at the university, I read of some

round-the-world traveler using tacks in a signal gun. So I disclaim originality."

"My 'Worrold Alm-in-ack' not saying about this," Chahda said, grinning. "Is pretty lucky you have good memory for other books, Professor!"

Rick looked back at the vintas, rapidly falling astern. The pirates were well beyond gunshot now. "Victory at Sea," he proclaimed. "Thanks to the professor's college education!"

CHAPTER XI

# The Dancing Pirates

THE *Swift Arrow* rode at anchor in the gathering dusk, inside a snug bay formed by a U-shaped island of the Kinapusan Group. The island was very small, and uninhabited. It was surrounded by larger islands that formed a kind of screen.

"Let's hope we can spend the night undisturbed," Zircon boomed as he finished the last of his coffee. "I could use a good night's sleep."

"We all could," Rick agreed. He helped himself to more of the stew Scotty had concocted. "Funny about a fight. That one was over in a few minutes, but I feel as thought I'd done a day's work at hard labor."

"A perfectly normal reaction," Zircon replied. "Our minds and bodies are wonderful things. When we face danger our whole system goes into high gear, our endocrines pumping fluids that get our bodies ready for fast action, or for wounds. We operate at top physical efficiency. Then, when the danger is past and our minds signal that it's time

to get back to normal, we show the effects of our overstimulation by a kind of lassitude."

That was true, Rick knew from his own experience. It seemed that he was always scared stiff before a fight, cool as could be during it, and limp as boiled lettuce when it was over.

Zircon changed the subject. "Scotty, when you first spotted the pirates, from what direction were they coming?"

The boy thought it over. "From about due south," he said at last. "But when they spotted us the line shifted to the east, on an interception course. They came from south originally, though."

"Not from southwest?" Zircon persisted.

"No. If anything, it was a little east of south, not west."

"Uhuh. That was my impression, but I wanted to be sure. Now, according to the chart, most of the scattered islands of the Tawi Tawi Group lie more westerly than south of here. If the pirates came from due south, it means they swung wide to miss the inhabited islands."

Chahda asked, "What means this to you, sir?"

"I'm not sure. I think it means we had better search the seas to the eastward of the main Tawi Tawi chain. The pirates would certainly have come from a westerly direction if their headquarters were anywhere near Tawi Tawi."

The big scientist rose. "I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm for bed. Who has the first watch?"

"I'm on the eight-to-midnight," Rick replied. "It's

after eight now, so I'll stand by. Chahda relieves me at twelve, you come on at four, and Scotty finishes the night."

They had arranged the anchor watches that way because a single guard would be enough while at anchor, and it would allow each of them a good night's sleep.

Zircon and Chahda retired at once, but Scotty lingered. The two sat on the afterdeck and watched the stars for a few moments.

"How are we doing?" Scotty asked quietly.

Rick knew what he meant. "I'm scared," he said. "It's a big ocean, and we could miss easily. Also, I'm thinking about what Chahda said. Even if we find Shan, we won't get Tony and Shannon back without a fight. There must be hundreds of pirates, if the fleets we've seen are a sample." He was sure that the northern attack had been made by a different group than the one that attacked earlier in the day.

"Do you think they're still alive?" Scotty asked.

"We have to assume they are. What else can we do?"

"Nothing," Scotty replied sensibly. "Except say our prayers faithfully."

"Amen," Rick said. "Go on to bed. You must be tired."

"I am. See you in the morning."

After Scotty had gone below, Rick sat quietly, depending more on ears than eyes to keep watch. Again and again he reviewed every bit of information they had obtained, re-examining it to see if any

nugget of value might have been overlooked. At last he decided they had done everything possible. The rest would be persistence, and luck.

His thoughts turned to home, and he wondered what his folks were doing. It was nine o'clock, Manila time. At Spindrift it was eight this morning. The family would be gathering for breakfast, and Barby would be slipping Dismal, the family pup, scraps of bacon under the table.

Rick resolved to send a cable from Tawi Tawi, if they should stop there. He knew the family would be anxious to know how things were going.

The watch ticked away without incident. A few minutes before midnight Rick woke Chahda and joined the Hindu boy in a glass of cold coke. Then he went to bed and drifted off to sleep immediately.

Some inner instinct awakened him. For a moment he lay quietly, his heart pounding, eyes blinking in the darkness. Then he heard the pad of bare feet as Scotty got to his feet.

"What's up?" Rick whispered.

"Just restless, I guess," Scotty whispered back.

Rick was wide awake now. He slipped into shoes and trousers while Scotty did the same. A few minutes in the cool air on deck would make him sleepy again, he thought.

"On deck!" Chahda gave a wild yell. "Come quick!" The words were punctuated by gunfire.

Instantly Zircon leaped to his feet and ran for the door.

Rick emerged into the lesser darkness of the deck

in time to see Chahda fire at moving shapes on the water. The Hindu boy's shot was answered by a dozen rifles, and Rick heard Chahda gasp.

"Pirates!" Chahda yelled. "Where is light?"

For answer, Scotty switched on the boat's searchlight and swiveled it. Rick shouted. A dozen vintas were closing rapidly, propelled by paddles. Fleetingly he thought that some sound or sense of danger must have awakened him, then he grabbed for Shannon's bow, realized in the same instant that it would do little good in the darkness, and put it back.

Zircon took the pistol from Chahda while Scotty found his rifle. The two started a steady fire that was returned in ragged volleys as the pirates tried to shoot out the light. They came close, but the light stood undamaged. Rick thanked his guardian angel that they were poor shots.

It was obvious that even pistol and rifle fire could not keep the pirates from boarding. Rick jumped to the controls and started the engines. If they could only slip the anchor, it might be possible to ram through the pirate craft and find safety in the open water. But even as he borrowed Chahda's kris and started to run to the bow to cut the anchor rope, the first vinta slammed into the torpedo boat.

Dark figures swarmed up the sides with piercing yells. Rick ran to meet them, swinging the kris.

He realized vaguely that the pirate yells had turned somehow to screams that seemed anguished, but his thoughts were occupied only with getting the Moros off the deck. In the faint scattered light at

the side of the searchlight beam he saw that they were dancing, wildly, like Indians in a TV horse opera!

Scotty joined him in the wild rush up the deck and the two boys hit the Moros at the same instant. Rick swung the kris like a flail, while the butt of Scotty's rifle slammed into bodies and heads.

The Moros turned with one accord and went over the side!

Zircon yelled, "Another boat back here!"

But Rick and Scotty had troubles of their own. Moros were pouring onto the deck from the bow, where another vinta had tied up to the anchor rope. They ran to meet the new attack, and were astonished to see the pirates go into the same screaming dance. Then they were fighting again, Rick wielding the kris with deadly effect, too frantic even to wonder why the Moros weren't fighting more fiercely.

From the stern came a wild yell from Zircon, a great bellow that had overtones of pain. Rick's breath caught. Had the big scientist gone down?

But the bellowing roar continued and he knew Zircon was still alive. Rick could do nothing at the moment anyway, except to swing the kris until his arm felt as though the muscles were on fire. Next to him, Scotty slammed home a butt stroke that lifted a pirate high off his feet and threw him outward into the water. It was an instant before Rick realized the deck was clear, then he turned and ran to the stern while Scotty reversed his rifle and shot the vinta

clear of pirates in the glare from the searchlight. From the corner of his eye Rick could see the Moros from the bow vinta scuttling through the water toward other boats, and toward land.

At the stern Zircon towered like a mighty champion of mythology. Rick saw him lift a pirate bodily, pluck the barong from his hand, and throw him against two other pirates. At the scientist's side Chahda fought valiantly with his left hand, his flying barong glittering in the scattered back light of the searchlight. By the time Rick reached his friends the deck was clear.

Chahda ran and swiveled the searchlight, and Rick saw that the vintas were pulling away, amidst yells of rage from the pirates. Up on the bow, Scotty was shooting as fast as he could aim and pull trigger, with pauses only to slap a fresh clip into the rifle. The return fire continued, but without order or enthusiasm, and in a few moments it stopped altogether.

"They're gone," Rick said with relief. "Is anyone hurt?"

"Little bit," the Hindu boy answered. "When is time, maybe could use bandage."

Scotty joined the three on the stern. "I'll get the first-aid kit. Professor, are you hurt?"

"Like fire," Zircon answered grimly. "I'll never be the same again." He sank down on a convenient seat and began to examine his feet. "But let's get out of here and attend to Chahda when we're under way. They may attack again, if they can find shoes."

The comment baffled Rick, but he didn't stop to question. He hurried forward to pull in the anchor, and found a vinta still attached to the rope. For a moment he debated about cutting it loose, then realized that it would only be picked up by the pirates and used against them. He untied the vinta line from the anchor rope and temporarily hitched it to a bitt while he hauled in the anchor.

The vinta was light and easy to tow. He hauled it to the stern of the MTB and attached the line to a cleat. Scotty was already at the wheel.

"Go!" Rick commanded.

Scotty shot the searchlight beam toward the entrance to the harbor and put the engines in gear. The MTB moved with gathering speed, following the clear path indicated by the searchlight. Once the light picked up a vinta, but off to one side. Scotty gave it a wide berth.

As they cleared the bay, Rick got the first-aid kit and took Chahda down into the cabin. The Hindu boy's shoulder was covered with blood. Rick hurriedly cut way the clothes, afraid of what he might find. Zircon joined him, watching anxiously.

"Is not bad," Chahda said. "Just made me stop fighting for a few minutes."

Rick saw that the boy was right. A bullet had creased his right shoulder, digging a deep furrow from which the blood welled. It was painful, but at least they weren't faced with the problem of getting the bullet out. He sterilized the wound and bound it tightly with gauze pads. Then he washed Chahda

clean of blood and put him to bed with a blanket over him in case of shock.

"How about you, Professor?" Rick asked. "You said something about being wounded, but I don't see any blood."

Zircon chuckled grimly. "Not much blood, anyway. How did you happen to be wearing shoes?"

Rick explained that he and Scotty had awakened before the attack and had gotten partially dressed to go on deck.

"Then you don't know," Zircon said. Suddenly he put his head back and roared with laughter. "Did you ever see anything weirder than those pirates dancing? I thought they'd gone insane in wholesale lots!"

Rick stared at the scientist. "I noticed," he said. "I wondered about it, too."

"But you don't know the reason!" Zircon pointed at Chahda, who grinned weakly from his bunk. "There's the cause of it all. He routed the enemy with minimum help from us, even after he was wounded."

Rick turned to stare at Chahda. "What's he talking about?"

The Hindu boy shook his head. "I was sleepy, and I afraid maybe fall asleep, which big disgrace. So what I do? I fix things to hurt pirates, but also I hurt Professor Zircon, for which I plenty sorry."

"But how?" Rick demanded.

"Oh, I remembered that in Jolo I never see Móros wear shoes. Not very many, anyway."

Zircon had mentioned shoes, too. Rick groaned with impatience. "What have shoes to do with it?"

Chahda grinned. "I borrow the professor's cannon ammunition. All around edge of deck I sprinkled, so when pirates come, they dance, and soon they have plenty."

Rick got it then. He sat down and laughed until Scotty had to stick his head in to see what was going on.

Rick pointed at Chahda. "The Hindu wizard!" he roared. "You know what he did? He sprinkled the deck with tacks! No wonder the pirates danced!"

CHAPTER XII

# Search the Wide Seas

THERE was an atmosphere of rising excitement on the *Swift Arrow*. Rick felt it, and knew the others did, too. Little by little they were narrowing the search. With only a few island groups remaining, he felt sure it would not be long before the pirate stronghold was located.

The *Swift Arrow* had poked its sharp bow into nearly every port in the vast Tawi Tawi Group, and had put into the port of Dungun on the main island to refuel. Since the pirate attack of two nights before, the Spindrifters had practically eliminated the Tawi Tawi islands as possibilities for the pirate hideout.

Hobart Zircon, checking their progress on the chart, called the boys together.

"There's only one island group remaining in this immediate area," Zircon pointed out, "and I'm not even sure it's in Philippines waters."

Rick studied the place on the chart indicated by the big scientist. There were only three tiny islands in the Datu Amman Group.

"They're pretty far to the southeast," Rick commented. "Just about on the border of Indonesia and the Philippines. Do we head for them next?"

Zircon poked a big finger at the chart. "I think we'd better. Then, if we find nothing, we can head southwest toward Sibutu Island."

"These Datu Amman islands aren't very big," Rick pointed out. "But that's the general direction from which the pirates have been coming. We have to eliminate every island in this area before going on to Sibutu and Borneo."

"We've got full tanks," Scotty observed. "Might as well get started."

"I think this also," Chahda agreed. "We not miss any islands. Besides, these far out of way, not on ship lanes. Could be good place for pirates."

"My thoughts exactly," Zircon stated. "Who has the wheel? . . . Chahda? . . . All right. Head southeast, and I'll plot a course."

"Why not use both engines?" Rick suggested. "Then we can get there before dark. If nothing turns up, we can travel all night from there to Sibutu. It's all open water."

"If we use both engines, someone had better keep watch from on top of the pilothouse," Scotty added. "Then, if we see vintas, we can throttle down. That way, we won't have to give up our disguise of being a partial cripple."

"Good idea," Zircon approved. "Suppose you start, Scotty? Rick can relieve you later."

Rick grinned. "That's what you get for having

ideas. Tell you what, I'll toss you. Heads I take the first watch topside, tails I'll start making lunch."

"Sold." Scotty produced a centavo and they flipped. Rick won and climbed to the top of the pilothouse while Scotty went below to prepare sandwiches.

Rick sat in a canvas chair Zircon handed up to him and watched the sea, now and then sweeping the horizon with Shannon's long glass. The *Swift Arrow* cut the water cleanly, with both engines roaring at three-quarters throttle.

They were cruising the Celebes Sea now, the Sulu Archipelago rapidly falling astern. It was a calm, clear day without even a single whitecap to mar the blue perfection of the sea. Now and then a school of flying fish broke water from under the MTB's bow, and twice Rick spotted sharks, one of them a hammerhead. There were no vintas in sight.

Zircon handed up sandwiches and coffee, then relieved Chahda at the wheel. The Hindu boy's shoulder was healing nicely, but it was still a little stiff and he was careful not to move his arm more than necessary for fear of breaking open the wound.

The afternoon wore on without sign of a sail. Scotty relieved Rick, who relaxed on the afterdeck. The boy glanced at his watch. They should be picking up the islands soon.

Suddenly Scotty sang out, "Sail ho."

"How many?" Rick called.

"Just one. On the horizon, off the port bow."

Rick relieved Chahda at the helm, and the Hindu

boy hurried below, saying that he wanted a cold drink before the fight started. Rick watched for the vinta sail, but before the craft was visible from his lower vantage point, Scotty called out again. "Land! Behind the vinta. Looks like a coral atoll. I can see the tips of palms."

Zircon checked the chart. "It should be the most westerly of the three islands," the physicist reported. "Scotty, any more vintas?"

"Just the one."

"Head for the island," Zircon instructed Rick. "We'll want a close look."

Chahda emerged from the galley with cold cokes for all hands, and they drank while waiting for the boat to get within examination distance of the island. It was clearly visible within a short time. As Scotty had said, it was a coral atoll, the highest point not more than ten feet above sea level.

They passed the vinta at a distance of a hundred yards. There were only three men aboard, and they were fishing. Then Rick cut closer to the island while Scotty kept a sharp lookout for shoal waters and coral heads.

Details were clearly visible now. There were a dozen huts on the island, and only a handful of people were visible. Zircon took the long glass from Scotty and inspected carefully, "Apparently it's a small fishing community. I see nets, and another three vintas pulled up on shore. There seems to be . . . Wait!"

Rick watched as the scientist swung the long

glass into the air, followed something for a moment, then lowered it, his face grim.

"I caught a glimpse of a man releasing something into the air, and managed to pick it up with the glass. It was a pigeon. And you know what that means!"

The boys did. "Which way did it go?" Rick asked.

"Due east."

Rick swung the MTB onto an easterly course without another word. He knew from the chart that the biggest island of the three in the Datu Amman Group lay that way. The third island was about ten miles to the north. Release of the carrier pigeon could mean only that the island they were now passing was a lookout position, from which the people on the biggest island had now been notified of their arrival. And that meant . . . what? Rick had a good idea, which inspection should soon prove!

"Land ho!" Scotty called down. "It's a peak of some sort."

Rick saw it a few moments later, a golden glitter on the ocean as the fast-setting sun struck land.

The four watched as the land mass slowly took shape. "It's a mountain, all right," Zircon said, excitement in his booming voice. "Looks like a volcanic cone. Can you see it clearly, Scotty?"

"It's a cone, and not much land under it, either. Hey! Vintas ahead! Must be a hundred of them!"

Rick felt excitement surge through him. That was too many vintas for a simple fishing community on an island of small size!

"They're forming a line between us and the island!" Scotty called down a moment later.

Rick could make out the tips of sails, and as the *Swift Arrow* forged ahead, the entire fleet slowly came into view. Scotty was right. The vintas were in a line—like a planned defense!

The island was almost entirely visible, now. A volcanic cone, perhaps five hundred feet high, formed most of the island. From the base of the cone, flat land spread out toward the oncoming MTB, ending in a white beach.

"Get within gunshot of the vintas," Zircon directed grimly. "Let's see if they're really hostile. If they are, we'll know we've found something. And forget the crippled engine disguise. It's served its purpose."

Rick figured his course carefully. He would take the MTB on a gradually sweeping curve that would place them within gunshot, but in a position to beat a fast retreat. In a few minutes, now, they would be in position. He kept his fingers crossed. Things looked promising. If this were only the end of the search.

He throttled back a little, in order to keep a good amount of speed in reserve, and kept the MTB on the course he had planned, sweeping toward one end of the vinta line. He saw the outrigger craft back their sails as they turned to intercept him. Then, as the long curve brought him within rifle range he put the helm hard over, running broadside to the line of bright sails.

Scotty called, "Watch it! Heads down!" The boy was flat on the top of the pilothouse now, his own rifle within reach.

As an echo to his warning Chahda yelled, "They shoot!"

Rick couldn't hear the shots above the engine roar, but he took Chahda's word for it. He put the helm over again, turning the stern toward the line of boats.

Scotty jumped to the deck. "They took several shots at us, but none hit. I saw the muzzle flashes."

Zircon nodded. "I saw muzzle flashes, too. Lads, it looks as though we've really found something, including a mountain. Now, I suggest we reconnoiter thoroughly."

"What's your plan?" Rick asked.

"Circle the island completely, at close range. Swing wide, to approach from the north, then go around the island clockwise, staying as close to shore as safety allows. We can outrun the vintas without trouble. If necessary, we can even cut inside the line for a close look." The big physicist was almost trembling with excitement.

Rick wasted no time in swinging north, away from the vintas. Scotty went back to the top of the pilothouse to watch for shoal waters. Once he was far beyond the line of vintas, Rick cut back again, pointing the bow of the MTB at the northern shore of the island. He took out his handkerchief to wipe palms that were suddenly damp with nervous perspiration. This had to be the place!

He could see now that the volcanic peak occupied the entire eastern part of the island. It dropped steeply into the ocean on both the eastern and northern shores. The inhabitable land area was a broad shelf that sloped from the base of the volcano to the western shore.

As the MTB plowed toward the island more details became visible. There was a very small crescent of beach on the northern shore, but black volcanic rock dropped into the sea in most places.

"Let's see what the rest of this place looks like," Zircon directed.

Rick put the MTB on a curving course that would take them completely around the island, about a hundred yards offshore. They left the northern coast and passed the eastern edge of the island. Surf broke on the black volcanic rock on the eastern shore, except at one point where there appeared to be a fair-sized cove.

The southern shore was equally forbidding until the volcanic cone was passed. There was a large cove where the land shelf met the volcano. Docks could be seen, and a few vintas. Apparently this was the island's boat anchorage.

Zircon nodded his satisfaction. "We seem to have something here, boys. It's an ideal spot for a pirate stronghold. Notice they didn't try to follow us, or cut us off anywhere except on the west? That's because the island is a natural fortress, except for the western land slope. They need only look for trouble from the west."

The MTB was in sight of the pirate fleet again. They were still in a battle array to protect the vulnerable western shore. The line of vintas formed a long curve from a point just off the pirate anchorage around the western shore to where the volcano rose from the land shelf on the north.

"I'll stay out of rifleshot," Rick said. "Take a look at the village through the long glass, Professor. There may be some sign of Shannon and Tony."

"I'm not hopeful about that," Zircon replied. "They'd be under cover."

The pirates made no move to follow the MTB on its curving course around their battle line. Apparently the vintas were holding position in a planned defense. Across the vinta line, Rick could see a field of what appeared to be grain, separated by a street from a field of what was certainly corn. The village itself was of nipa shacks on stilts, all of them located near the volcano. There were a few trees, mostly mango and avocado.

"Plenty room for plenty pirates," Chahda commented.

Rick grinned mirthlessly. "You're so right." The village would provide housing for three or four hundred, anyway.

"No sign of volcanic activity," Scotty said. "It must be a dead volcano. Anyway, I don't think even pirates would be foolish enough to live under a live one."

"You're right," Zircon agreed. He waved a hand

at the island. "Does anyone doubt that this is the right place?"

No one did.

"I not seeing scientists," Chahda observed.

"They wouldn't be in the open, anyway. But did anyone see their boat?"

"All boats were vintas," Rick replied.

"I thought so, too. However, I wouldn't expect the pirates to keep the *Sampaguita* in sight. Head back toward Tawi Tawi, Rick. We've plans to make!"

Rick returned the scientist's jubilant grin, then he turned to look back at the rapidly receding pirate island, the volcano black and forbidding in the gathering dusk.

"We'll be back," he promised the invisible scientists. "We'll be back!"

CHAPTER XIII

# The Two Datus

THE *Swift Arrow* moved slowly through the darkness toward the Tawi Tawi Group. Chahda was at the helm, while Rick, Scotty, and Zircon held a council of war in the cabin. The Hindu boy kept popping in and out, letting the MTB travel with locked rudder for a few minutes at a time so he could be in on the conference.

"It has to be Shan," Rick said flatly. "No fishing village ever had that many vintas. And no peaceful fishermen ever fired on a stranger the way that mob fired on us. Besides, there's a mountain."

"I agree." Zircon examined his pistol barrel carefully, then ran a cleaning rag through it again. "Furthermore, those vintas operated in a planned defense, in a way no fishermen would ever do. I'm convinced that it is the right island. The problem now is, what do we do?"

Scotty paused in reassembling his rifle after a thorough cleaning. "Is there a choice? We can't rush the village and rescue our friends, even if we knew

where they were. We'll have to get the constabulary, and the Philippines Naval Patrol, and mount an all-out assault on the place."

"No!" Rick exclaimed. "We can't do that. If the pirates saw an armed fleet approaching, they'd kill Tony and Shannon, and get rid of their bodies. The fleet would find nothing at all."

Chahda asked in quick alarm, "You think they kill scientists when we come today?"

"I doubt it," Rick explained. "After all, one boat isn't a threat to them, even a fast one like this one. I think they'd only get rid of Tony and Shannon if they saw they were going to be invaded."

"Then what can we do?" Scotty asked.

"I'm not sure. Anyway, the first thing is to see if our friends are really there. When we get some more facts, maybe we can work out a plan."

Zircon nodded. "That's sensible. The question is, how can we reconnoiter the island? Circling it in the boat again will only tell us what we already know."

"Only one way. We go look," Chahda pointed out.

Rick knew the Hindu boy was right. But getting ashore presented problems. If the MTB got within swimming distance, the pirates would see it. Of course they could row ashore by night in the rubber life raft the big boat carried. He suggested it to the others.

Chahda leaped at the idea. "Silent boat is good, Rick, but not rubber boat. You remember we still got vinta?"

"Of course!" Rick saw that Chahda had hit on the answer. They had left the captured vinta in a small cove on the shore of an uninhabited island a few miles to the north. "We can get it and tow it to easy sailing distance. The pirates won't think anything of a single vinta even if they see it. There must be boats coming and going all the time."

"That is what I think too." Chahda ran back to the helm.

"Won't they recognize the vinta?" Scotty asked, then answered his own question, "I guess not. I've seen a dozen sails like it, and the hull looks like all the rest."

"The plan might work," Zircon agreed. "We'll try it. First we get the vinta, then head south. By morning we'll be far out in the open sea. We can then make a wide circle and approach the island from the east. They won't expect us from that direction. Besides, only the western shore was guarded, so far as I could see."

Rick had a picture in his mind of the strip of isolated beach on the northern shore. If they could land there, no one would see them. Then they could climb over the stretch of lava between the beach and the land, or swim around to the point where the land began.

"I know the place," he volunteered, and told the others his idea, repeating it for Chahda's benefit as the boy reappeared at the cabin door.

Zircon thought it over. "It should work, unless they have a lookout posted at each side of the is-

land. But we can't know that until we try. Frankly, I doubt it. I think they believe the island is safe on all sides except the west. Now, who will go on this reconnaissance?"

"Rick and me," Chahda said firmly.

"I'm going," Scotty stated.

Zircon held up his hand. "Wait. Chahda, from your tone of voice, you have a reason. What is it?"

"Plenty reason. This small island, so who goes ashore will be seen, I think. So, must be in Moro clothes. Professor, you and Scotty not good size for Moro. You too big, and Scotty has too wide shoulders. Rick is maybe a little tall, but not so wide. He can maybe stoop a little. Me, I perfect for Moro. Even same color."

"You're right," Zircon agreed. "No question of it. So curb your impatience, Scotty. Your turn will come and so will mine. Chahda, you take the lead in figuring out disguises for you and Rick. Scotty, you and I will take over the watch and get underway."

By morning the *Swift Arrow,* with the vinta in tow, was in Indonesian waters far from shipping lanes or fishing grounds. Zircon figured their position as 120 degrees 29 minutes longitude, and 4 degrees 21 seconds latitude. They had seen no sails for hours.

The MTB was allowed to drift while the group went about the business of making ready. Chahda had created a Moro cap for Rick from a piece of upholstery he had cut from a seat bottom. Rick had

cut the seams in a pair of white duck trousers and laced them with twine from the rope locker until they fitted as tightly as Moro pants. One of his own shirts, dirtied up a little and left open at the collar, would complete his outfit.

Chahda cut one of his extra turbans in half and made sashes for both of them, and modified the wrapping of his own turban so that it was more like the flat Moro variety.

The only real problem was Rick's color. In spite of his deep tan he couldn't possibly pass for a Moro. He and Chahda searched the boat for something that would serve as a stain, then finally took their problem to the others.

Scotty had the answer. With a broad grin he went to his suitcase and drew out a can of brown shoe polish. "Neatness pays," he proclaimed. He passed it to Chahda with a flourish. "Don't give him too high a gloss when you polish him."

"How about shoes?" Zircon asked. "The polish reminded me. The pirates don't wear any."

"This pirate does," Rick declared. "I'll rub the shine off, but I can't go barefoot."

"Also," Chahda agreed. "Foots too tender. We could not run or fight in barefoots."

When everything was in readiness except for the application of polish, Rick and Chahda took time to eat, then got into the vinta and began practicing.

The craft was filthy, from years of accumulated dirt and no cleaning, and it offended Rick's nose. But more than that, it was hard to handle. He could

sail in conventional craft, but the outrigger design had its own peculiarities.

Slowly, as the day wore on, the two boys learned the Moro craft's ways until they could handle it fairly well. There were paddles, in case the wind failed, and Rick thought they might end up using the paddles, anyway.

As they tied up after the last practice run Zircon called them to eat, then instructed them to get some sleep. None of the four had slept more than an hour at a time since the previous morning, but the big scientist and Scotty had decided to handle the MTB themselves on the way to the pirate island, so Rick and Chahda could be fresh for the night's adventure.

After a meal of hot soup and crackers, the two boys climbed into their bunks and drifted off to sleep. Zircon and Scotty had already started the run toward Shan.

Rick awoke with Scotty shaking him. "Time to rise, old son."

The boy swung to the deck. "Where are we?"

"About five miles east of the island." Scotty shook Chahda and told the Hindu boy it was time to get up, then he sat down next to Rick. "I feel funny, not going with you. Maybe I'd better go along. I could stay in the vinta, and be ready in case of trouble."

Rick gave his pal a sympathetic grin. He knew how Scotty felt. "Look at it this way. If Chahda and I get caught, that leaves only you and Zircon. And

you couldn't give up, even with us out of the picture."

"I guess so." Scotty gave in reluctantly. "Come on. Coffee and sandwiches waiting. I'll go topside and help the professor keep a lookout."

Rick and Chahda got into their outfits, then the Hindu boy carefully rubbed in polish on Rick's face, neck, arms, and hands, and his chest where it showed through the open shirt.

Finally the Hindu boy stood back and admired his handiwork. "Plenty good. You make fine Moro, Rick."

Rick adjusted Chahda's kris in his sash. "So are you. You'd fool the Sultan of Sulu himself."

"We be two Datus," Chahda said, grinning. "Datu Rick and Datu Chahda."

"What's this date business?" Scotty asked as he came down from the pilothouse.

"Is Datu, not date. Datu is what Moros call Chiefs. We Datus."

"Okay, Datus. The professor wants a look at you. I'll go take the wheel while he comes down. We're blacked out topside, just in case there's a lookout on this side of the island."

In a moment Zircon came down and inspected them carefully. "You'd never pass in daylight, Rick," he said finally. "But at night there should be no trouble unless someone gives you a close inspection—in which case you'd be caught, anyway. Now, have some coffee and sandwiches while Scotty and I move the boat in closer."

Rick said doubtfully, "Isn't it dangerous to get too close?"

Chahda chimed in. "In 'Worrold Alm-in-ack,' says can see pretty far at sea. Volcano is maybe five hundred feet. Man on top can maybe see 25.6 ocean miles, says 'Alm-in-ack.' "

"True." Zircon smiled. "But that would be in daylight, with absolutely clear visibility. You recall that we didn't see the island yesterday until we were perhaps ten miles away? Water vapor in the air cuts down visibility here, and at night of course it's even less. If we're blacked out, I think we can get within two miles with safety. Fortunately, the moon set shortly after sunset. So our principal problem will be guessing how far away we can be heard. At low speed, on only one engine, I think two miles will be safe."

The professor had been figuring things out, Rick realized. He nodded approval. "All right. We'll be ready by the time you're in position. I'll leave my Megabuck unit on the boat, and we'll depend on Chahda's. Then, if we get caught, you and Scotty will still have two sets."

"You won't get caught," Zircon stated emphatically. "Don't even entertain the idea. I'm sure you can outrun the pirates. If you're spotted, call us, then get to the shore. We'll come roaring in. Also, I want you to take the pistol and extra clips. Then, if need be, you can hold off the mob for the few minutes it will take us to get there."

"All right." Rick didn't really believe they would

be caught. Chahda was an expert at reconnoitering, and he had had plenty of experience himself. Besides, it was good to be moving into action, no matter what the danger. They had searched for a long time. Now, their missing friends were within reach. He had to believe that because the alternative was to think they were dead.

"Let's eat, Chahda," he said. "Almost time to go."

CHAPTER XIV

# The High Fire

THE Celebes Sea was dark, with a low swell but no chop. There was just enough wind to fill the vinta's sail, which suited Rick. At this stage in the proceedings he was more concerned about silence and safety than speed. Zircon and Scotty had moved another mile seaward as soon as the vinta was launched. That was to avoid anyone on the island hearing the engines in case a sudden onshore wind came up.

Up ahead, Chahda was a dark blur against the sail, trimming it for maximum efficiency. Presently the Hindu boy came back to the tiller and sat down near Rick.

Shan's volcanic cone blotted out the stars ahead. There were no lights of any kind on the mountain itself, and the number of lights in the village was gradually diminishing.

The water splashed a little under the rudder, and the cordage holding the mast and sail creaked as a vagrant breeze caught the vinta. Otherwise, there was no sound. Once a fish jumped nearby, and Rick was halfway to his feet, hand going to the pistol

at his belt, before he realized what it was. He smiled at his own tenseness.

Rick wiped moist palms on the thighs of his tight pants and strained to see the first sign of the beach on which he and Chahda would land. Chahda, according to plan, moved to the bow of the Moro craft in order to keep a lookout.

The timing was all right, Rick thought. There were still lights in the village, but not many. Early, when too many pirates were out of doors, would not be a good time. Later, when perhaps only guards were moving around, would be even worse. They had tried to time their reconnaissance for an in-between period, and it looked as though the selection of the hour was good. Most villagers were in bed, but enough kerosene lamps and candles burned to show that the two of them probably would not attract special attention by being out so late.

Chahda came back and whispered, "We drop sail now."

"Okay." Rick was careful to keep his voice at a whisper. He knew sound carried across the water.

The boys let the sail down and lashed it just enough to keep a sudden breeze from tangling the lines, then took paddles and steered for the small crescent of beach that made a light streak between the sea and the black rock of the volcano. The lights of the village were gradually lost as the jutting rock between the beach and the western land slope blocked their view.

Rick and Chahda timed their paddle strokes to

catch a low wave as it sped to shore, and in a moment the vinta's bow grated on sand. Chahda jumped to shore, carrying the craft's anchor—a block of stone with a hole in it for the rope—and hauled the vinta's bow up on dry coral sand. Rick stepped to the sand and paused, ears tuned for any unusual noise. He heard nothing except the sharp barking of a dog in the village.

"If this is like most Asiatic villages, there'll be enough mutts to make it a dog catcher's paradise," he whispered in Chahda's ear. "They'll give us away sure!"

Chahda shook his head. "Leave to me. Have plenty sad experience with dogs. I come ready for them."

Rick wondered how the Hindu boy was prepared, but he realized this was no time for questions. He put his lips close to the hidden radio unit under Chahda's turban and called softly, "Rick to home base."

"Go ahead, Rick," Zircon's voice said faintly through the heavy folds of turban.

"We're on the beach, about to leave the vinta."

"Good luck. We're standing by for a fast run if needed. Be careful."

"We will," Rick promised. "Off for now." He drew the automatic from his sash, pulled back the slide, and let it carry a round into the chamber. Then he lowered the hammer to half cock and made sure the safety was on. He tucked the pistol into his sash, and loosened the kris in its sheath.

Chahda drew his barong and made a few practice swings. The blade gleamed in the starlight.

Rick led the way, westward along the beach to where the black lava rock lay in tumbled masses. If they could climb across the tongue of lava, all would be well. If not, they would have to return to the beach and swim around it.

The lava was in big chunks, and there were ample hand and footholds. It was an easy climb to the top of the flow, only about twenty feet above sea level, and an easy climb down again. The only hard part was moving across the top of the flow, through the mass of lava boulders.

Presently the two boys stood on soil, still hidden among lava outcroppings. The village was to their left. In front of them, to the west, was a cornfield. Rick wasn't surprised to see the corn. He knew that from the central Philippines south to Sulu there was more corn eaten than rice.

"Keep an eye open for a guard," he whispered to Chahda. "We'll wait a few minutes to see if one shows up. Then, if it seems clear, we'll move along the edge of the cornfield toward the village."

"Good plan," Chahda agreed.

Rick strained to catch sound or motion. When his luminous watch dial told him five minutes had elapsed, he leaned toward Chahda. "No sign of a guard. Let's go."

Apparently the pirates were sure attack could come only from the west, as Zircon had thought.

Undoubtedly they had lookouts on the western shore.

Rick led the way, keeping close to the abrupt rise of the volcanic cone. He saw there were plenty of gaps and holes in the lava into which they could duck, as well as the cornfield. Knowing they could be out of sight in a matter of seconds gave him confidence, and he moved rapidly ahead.

A slight breeze brought him the scent—or rather stench—of the village. He wrinkled his nose and suppressed a sneeze. Wow! If the pirates possessed any virtues, cleanliness was not one of them.

The cornfield ran right up to the edge of the village, which was nestled under a point where the volcano dropped steeply for perhaps a hundred feet. It was a good defensive position, Rick saw. The black lava cliff probably could be climbed, and would offer a wonderful location for riflemen. Even heavy weapons would have a hard time dislodging them.

Ahead was a kind of street, a wide gap between rows of houses. Some of the houses showed the yellow flickering light of candles or kerosene lamps, but most were dark. The houses were raised up on piles, in the fashion common throughout the Philippines, and most of them offered little obstruction to the view.

Rick shrank back as a man walked down the street, turned, and went up a ladder into one of the houses. In the dim light Rick could see that he had

tight pants, a flat turban, and a rifle in his hand. The boy shuddered. There probably were enough deadly weapons in the village to outfit a regimental combat team. One slip and those weapons would be turned on them.

Chahda put his lips close to Rick's ear. "What we do now?"

"Look for a house with guards, I guess."

It seemed the only possibility. If Tony and Shannon were in the village, they would almost certainly be guarded. Guards probably would be the only clue to their presence.

For long moments Rick debated on how best to approach the problem. There wasn't any easy way. He tapped Chahda on the shoulder. "Let's go."

The two boys stepped out from their concealment against the volcanic wall and walked boldly into the village.

Rick had his fingers crossed for luck, but he was ready to uncross them in a hurry and go for the pistol in his sash. Their disguises had to protect them from casual viewers. He had confidence that the deep shadows of the village would conceal the fact that they were strangers, unless they came face to face with someone.

The street paralleled the face of the volcano, with houses on both sides. For the first few steps they saw no one, then far down the street a Moro crossed, and it took all of Rick's courage to keep walking casually ahead.

Nearby a dog barked, and the noise sent a stream

of sweat dripping down Rick's back. The barking continued, drew nearer. Rick half drew his kris, but Chahda whispered hoarsely, "Wait!"

A mongrel of indiscriminate breed sidled up to them, hackles raised, teeth gleaming faintly in a snarl. Chahda bent low and murmured. The dog leaped frantically, and Rick's heart caught in his throat. Then the Hindu boy miraculously was petting the vicious mutt.

"What did you do?" Rick demanded in a whisper.

"You remember canned hombargers? I open can and put some in my pocket. Feed one to dog. He our friend now. Come on."

Rick had to grin. The mysterious Hindu! Behind the mystery was a practical solution to problems. Just stick a couple of "hombargers" in the pocket.

The boy led the way again, Chahda hurrying to catch up. Beside them, the once-fierce dog gamboled like a puppy, hoping for another handout.

In a few moments Rick saw that the two streets of the town formed a huge T, with the stem starting under the mountain and running toward the west. He had an idea that Tony and Shannon would be near the center of the village, in the most protected position—simply because it would be easier to guard them that way. That meant they would be close to the intersection where he and Chahda now stood.

A poke in the ribs from Chahda took his mind off the problem in a hurry, and put it on a new and immediate one. A man was walking directly toward

them, coming from the direction of the western shore. Rick couldn't see him clearly; it was too dark in the village. But he could see enough to know that the pirate carried a rifle and had a barong tucked into his belt.

Rick's hand started for the pistol, then paused. He couldn't shoot now. It would bring the whole village down on them. For a moment he nearly panicked, then with a nod to Chahda he walked directly toward the man. The bold approach was the best one, he figured. To run was to bring a shot. He had a vague idea of getting within range, then jumping the Moro. Certainly they couldn't stop and talk with him; neither of them knew the language.

The pirate didn't seem uncertain, or alarmed. He walked toward the two boys casually, obviously not yet recognizing them as strangers. He would soon, Rick knew. It was important to get the jump on the Moro first, and prevent him yelling, if possible.

Then, as Rick prepared for a wild spring and a roundhouse punch, Chahda whispered, "Be ready," and lifted his hand in salute. The Moro lifted his hand, too, and said something in the native tongue. It might have been a greeting; neither boy ever knew for sure.

Chahda walked right up to him, muttering something that was probably Hindu double talk. The Indian boy moved so that the Moro swung around, trying to understand what Chahda was saying.

For an instant the pirate's back was to Rick. He

moved like a charging panther. The pistol came out of his sash and descended barrel first, all his desperate strength behind it. He felt it slam down on the pirate's turban and connect solidly with the head underneath.

Chahda caught the man as he fell, and in an instant the two boys had hauled him under the nearest house.

Rick found the man's pulse and breathed an inaudible sigh of relief. It was thready and slow, but it was there. The pirate would wake up, but not for some time. The dog sniffed inquiringly at the fallen Moro, but made no noise. Rick took Chahda by the arm and pulled him out into the street again, pausing anxiously to see if the brief and violent meeting had attracted attention. Apparently it hadn't. There were no signs of life in nearby houses, and no one looked out of those with lights farther along the street.

Rick decided they had better conduct their search with all possible speed. The boys moved rapidly along the street at the top of the T, toward the waterfront on the south. The dog trotted alongside, their firm friend now. Rick knew the boat dock must be at the end of the street. That would certainly mean guards, and it wouldn't be wise to go too close.

He had a sudden thought that the scientists might be prisoners on one of the vintas, then rejected it. No vinta they had seen was big enough to serve as a prison, and there had been no sign of the boat

the missing men had rented. That could also mean the scientists weren't even on the island. But if not, where could they be?

Chahda's hand on his arm stopped Rick. He saw that they had nearly completed their inspection of this particular street. The masts of vintas and the sheen of water among the pirate craft were visible directly ahead.

He put his lips close to Chahda's ear and whispered, "Let's cut west, through the houses."

Rick's idea was to go through the quadrant of town they were now traversing, until he saw the waterfront on the west. Then they could cross the street that he pictured as the stem of the "T" and turn back toward the mountain, going through the town on the other side. That way, if any trouble developed, they would be only a few yards from the cornfield, and could certainly lose themselves until Zircon and Scotty could come roaring in.

They passed under a lighted house, and through the split bamboo floor laths they could see two men drinking *basi,* or some other native beverage, from sections of bamboo. Now and then the two men talked in casual, drowsy tones.

Nowhere was there a sign of guards until Rick and Chahda passed completely through the village and emerged under the great branches of a mango tree. Ahead of them was a field of grain, probably millet, and beyond it was the western shore of the island. As they watched, two men walked along the shore toward each other, met, chatted for a mo-

ment, then turned and walked away from each other again.

"Guards," Rick said softly. "Walking their patrols along the beach."

It was as he suspected. The two guards, patrolling the beach, could see everything that offered danger by walking from where they had met to points roughly halfway around the island.

"Maybe they see us in the vinta," Chahda whispered. "But maybe they no think much about it."

Rick thought he might be right, but the greater probability was that they hadn't been seen at all, especially if they had approached the shore while the guards were walking toward each other near the western end of the island.

"We'll be a little more cautious on the way back," Rick returned softly.

"Is so," Chahda agreed. "What we do now?"

Rick motioned toward the street that led from the volcano to the western shore. "Cross that and look at the houses on the other side. Come on."

With a quick look around to be sure no one was watching, or showing any undue interest in them, he moved out from the shadow of the mango tree and headed past the irregularly placed houses to where the wide strip of yellow dust marked the street.

They reached the street's edge without incident, and paused for another quick look before crossing. As Rick glanced up the street a flicker of yellow high in the air caught his eye. He lifted his head and

stared directly at it. A fire! It was high up on the face of the cliff behind the village, where they couldn't have seen it from the street under the cliff.

He wondered. Was it a beacon for pirates who might be out in the vintas? Apparently it was on a shelf of some sort more than a hundred feet above the village.

Then, as he watched, a tall, thin figure passed in front of the fire and was silhouetted briefly against the flames.

He grabbed for Chahda. That was no Moro, not with those long legs and arms! And no Moro on this island would wear thick glasses, from which the firelight had glinted momentarily.

That was Howard Shannon!

CHAPTER XV

# Plan of Attack

THE boys crossed the street, crept past several houses, and gained the safety of the cornfield. Slowly, so that rustling leaves and stalks would not give them away, they crossed the cornfield. To Rick, at least, it was a terribly long and slow journey. He wanted to give a yell of joy and triumph. He wanted to call Zircon immediately and pass on the good news. But he knew silence was important, and he kept his exultation locked inside.

As they reached the lava flow Chahda gave the now-faithful pirate dog the last of his hamburgers, and the boys climbed across the lava to the beach. Only then did Rick dare to stop long enough to call the *Swift Arrow.*

"We found Shannon," he said triumphantly. "Now we have to get out of here. We'll give you the details later."

The boys pushed off in the vinta and paddled toward the east in order to get farther away from the guards before putting up the sail. Then, because

the slight breeze had shifted, it was necessary to tack the cranky craft until dawn was pale in the east before they reached the *Swift Arrow.*

As the MTB moved quietly south, out of danger, Rick reported. "We saw Shannon, as I told you on the radio. I'm sure it was he. They're on the cliff at the back of the village. I'd guess the shelf where we saw the fire is over a hundred feet up."

"No sign of Briotti?" Zircon asked.

"None at all. Of course we couldn't see onto the shelf. There wasn't enough light and it was too high."

Scotty rubbed his chin. "How did they get up there?"

"Must be ladder," Chahda answered.

"A pretty good prison," Zircon commented. "No danger of escape, once the ladder or steps were removed, and the whole village serves as guard. The big question is, how do we get them out of there?"

Rick had thought about it during the tedious trip back. He had turned over every possibility in his mind and eliminated all but one. What's more, he wasn't sure that would work.

"I have an idea," he explained, "but it depends on a daytime look at the island."

Zircon nodded. "All right. We'll take a look. Now, tell us about the village. Any trouble?"

The two boys gave Zircon and Scotty a quick account of their reconnaissance, and both chuckled at Chahda's trick of feeding the dog.

"He'll probably be standing on the beach waiting

when you get back," Scotty said with a grin. "Bet it's the first hamburger the pooch ever had. That pirate you belted with the pistol bothers me, though. Won't he set off an alarm that will put the whole mob on the alert?"

"I hope not. There's a chance he might think it was someone in the village who has a grudge against him."

Zircon shrugged. "One way or another, there's nothing we can do about it now. We'll have to assume the whole place is alerted."

"How about some sleep?" Scotty suggested.

Rick shook his head. The first part of his plan had to be put into operation immediately. "It's only a little while to dawn. By sunrise we have to be east of the island."

He explained quickly. For a safe, undetected look at the areas of the island he wanted to see, they would have to depend on the sun for a shield. They could proceed immediately on a roundabout course that would bring them to the east of the island just as the sun was rising. Hidden in the sun's glare, they would have a few minutes in which to examine the eastern slope of the volcano.

"I'm beginning to see your plan," Zircon said. "Then what?"

"Then we go into safe waters for the day. At sunset we hide in the sun again, while we look at the island from the west. We'll wait until the sun is low enough, so no one on the island will be looking into it, then we'll use it for a shield and take a

good look at Shannon's cliff dwelling through the long glass."

Scotty shook his head. "But we already know what's on the eastern and western shores. Why go to all this trouble?"

"We don't know much about the terrain. If it looks possible, you and I go climbing tonight. We land on the eastern shore, climb the volcano, go over the top and down the western side until we come out right above the shelf where the scientists are held prisoner. Then we haul them up on a rope."

Scotty stared at his pal. "Wow! We take them out by the back door, huh?"

Zircon held up his hand. "Not so fast. The plan is a good one, Rick. I won't mention my natural dislike of being dismissed from the scheme without being consulted, because you and Scotty are the logical ones to go for a reconnaissance of this kind. But I'll buy only this: You and Scotty will look over the terrain tonight. If possible, you will deliver a Megabuck radio unit to Shannon and Briotti. Then you will return without attracting attention. That will be time enough for us to plan the rescue, in conjunction with our friends on the cliff."

Rick had to admit Zircon's plan made better sense, even though he disliked the idea of another day's delay in rescuing their friends. He nodded.

Scotty rose, his pleasure at the plan evident in his wide grin. "Let's go!"

Fifteen hours later the *Swift Arrow* withdrew to the open waters to the south as the sun slowly fell

below the horizon. The four adventurers gathered around the chart table and studied the island of Shan, comparing notes.

Zircon used a pair of dividers as a pointer. "This cove on the eastern shore looks like the best possibility for anchoring the vinta, and I'd say the climb up the volcano from there is no harder than from any other place."

Rick agreed. "It looked that way to me, too. We'll call that cove our back door. The only real puzzle is, does the volcano have a crater? If so, we'll have to go around it. Climbing down into the crater and up again would use up too much time."

Zircon shrugged. "We have no way of telling. Did anyone notice a preferred way around the cone?"

"The southern slope looks a little less steep," Scotty volunteered.

Chahda noded agreement. "I also think this. To me, big trouble is place right above cliff. Is pretty steep, I think."

The Hindu boy was right as usual, Rick thought. He had seen through the long glass that the area above the steep cliff was only slightly less vertical than the cliff itself, with an occasional shelf of rock. Not only would that be the hardest part of the trip, he guessed, but the most dangerous, since they would be in sight of the village part of the time.

"It's steep," Scotty agreed. "I'd say it's not a place to pick for a casual stroll, but I can't think of any other way to get our friends off that shelf. Can you?"

The others shook their heads. They had discussed it at length during the daylight hours while they floated patiently in the waters south of Shan, alternately sleeping and preparing for the night's work. Since no other plan seemed even remotely feasible, Rick and Scotty were to make the first try in about two hours.

The time passed swiftly with last-minute preparations. The boys carried rope, heavy spikes to be used as pitons on particularly difficult places, flashlights taped so only a pinpoint of light could emerge, cans of water from the emergency rations, work gloves from the clothing locker, and candy bars for quick-energy rations.

In addition, Rick had Zircon's pistol, a takedown fishing rod, with reel and line, a radio unit, and the long glass. Scotty had his rifle, a small first-aid kit, and a wooden caulking mallet.

The two boys were having a last cup of coffee when Chahda came down from the upper deck. "Is time," the Hindu boy told them. "We two miles east of Shan. Good wind. You make good time going in, not so good coming back."

The boys finished their coffee and went on deck. The four shook hands all around, and Zircon cautioned, "Give yourselves plenty of time for the return trip. Remember that if you're late, you'll have to hide on the volcano all day!"

CHAPTER XVI

# The Black Cliff

HEAVY seas broke against the rocky base of the island. Rick surveyed the cove they had chosen with some misgiving. The vinta wouldn't be safe if tied to shore. The breaking surf would batter it to bits before they could get back.

Scotty moved to his side. "Now what?"

"Swim," Rick said grimly. "Around that point looks like the most sheltered place, but it isn't good. The wind blows these waves halfway around the world, and they've got plenty of steam."

"Have to chance it," Scotty stated.

They maneuvered the cranky craft into the meager shelter of the point Rick had indicated, then dropped the stone anchor. It dragged along the bottom briefly, then caught in a cleft between two underwater rocks. It would hold unless the rope broke.

The boys took their belongings and bundled them in their clothes, along with shoes and weapons. Then, holding the bundles high with one hand,

they slipped into the water. In a few moments the two were rubbing themselves dry and putting their clothes on again.

Rick tried the radio unit while they rested. "Rick to Zircon."

"Standing by, Rick. Where are you?"

"Ashore." He described the situation briefly.

"I should have thought of that," Zircon replied. "The eastern shore is to windward. You were bound to have surf. Are you all right?"

"Yes. We're starting out now. We'll talk to you from on top, if it's safe." He hung the little radio around his neck by its lanyard, and stood up. "Ready to climb Mount Everest, brother Scott?"

Scotty stared up at the slope of the volcano. "If you are, brother Brant."

Neither boy was an experienced mountaineer, but both knew the principles of operation. They roped together and started the long climb. It was easy at first. The slopes low down were not steep, and the broken lava gave plenty of hand and footholds. But as they reached a point Rick estimated to be about two hundred feet above the water, the slope steepened sharply.

"Rest a moment," Scotty suggested. "We'll last longer if we take a breather once in a while."

Rick knew Scotty was right, but he resented the need for sitting idly for even a few minutes. He used the five-minute rest period to report to Zircon that all was well.

Rick led the way again as soon as the luminous

dial of his wrist watch showed that five minutes had elapsed. Twice he and Scotty were stalled for a brief time, but finally found a route and improved it by hammering the steel spikes in clefts in the rock. With the hammer padded, the sound was muffled to a point where it couldn't be heard more than a few feet away. The spikes could be used to belay their rope on the way down.

The last stage of the upward journey was to the top of the cone. It was nearly vertical, but wide cracks made it less difficult than some of the areas below. Scotty was leading now. He reached the top, then waited for Rick to join him.

Silently the two boys looked out over the dark sea, and Rick wished for a moment that he could see the view by daylight.

"Let's check the crater," Scotty suggested. He drew his flashlight, then inched forward across the rubble of the rim. Rick stayed beside him.

"Any danger of the beam being seen?" Scotty asked softly.

"No. The angle is wrong. If you keep it directed toward the crater, it will be invisible from the sea."

Rick watched as Scotty switched the light on. The pencil of light swept downward, and finally lost itself in nothingness.

The two boys stared at each other.

"The whole island's hollow!" Rick breathed. "I'll say this thing has a crater!"

"Plenty deep," Scotty agreed. "Well, that tears it. Nothing to do but go around. You lead the way."

Rick felt his way down until at last he was standing on the shoulder of the ancient volcano just below the final sweep upward to the crest. In a moment Scotty joined him. Slowly and carefully they started the long journey around, taking the southern slope as previously agreed.

It was hard going. In spots the lava was crumbly and gave under foot or hand. In others it was dense as steel slag.

When Rick estimated that over half the distance around the volcano had been covered he called Zircon and reported, then told the big scientist it would be their last contact for a while.

Within a hundred feet the lights of the village came in sight far below. The boys paused to survey the situation, and to examine the western part of the island. Most of it was visible from their vantage point. Only the cove where the vintas were kept and the section of village closest to the cliff were out of sight. Rick could see the beach clearly, and wondered if the guards were looking their way.

"Go carefully," Scotty whispered. "This is no time to start a landslide."

"Good advice," Rick whispered back. "But which way do we go now?"

"The slope to the left looks pretty good," Scotty answered softly. "We can cut back when we get down a little."

At the bottom of the slope, they found another drift that angled away toward the north. By the time they reached the bottom of it, Rick whispered

that they must be directly above the cave. He could see the lighter path of the street that ran from below the shelf toward the western end of the island. Now all that remained was to make their way down to within reach of the scientists.

They moved with extreme caution, fearful that the slightest noise would give them away, or that a wrong step would start a rockslide. It was painful work, going down backward most of the way. Once they reached what seemed to be a dead end, and lay on their stomachs surveying a sheer wall nearly twelve feet high.

Rick solved the problem by finding a lava boulder big enough and stable enough to serve as a rope anchor. They took an extra length of line Scotty carried and made it fast, then went down the rope hand over hand.

The whole village was spread before them now. Rick could even see the cross street that ran below the base of the cliff, and he knew they must be nearly within sight of the shelf on which the scientists were imprisoned.

"Tough section below," Scotty whispered so low that Rick could barely hear him. "I think it drops off sheer."

Another dozen feet of slow progress proved that Scotty was right. There was a small shelf, then the slope dropped away abruptly. Both boys lay flat, and slowly inched up to the drop and looked over.

Rick felt Scotty's hand grip his arm like an iron clamp at the same moment that he realized that an-

other shelf was directly below, a tiny campfire burning on it!

But that wasn't what Scotty had seen. At a point off to their right, and only slightly below them was a second, smaller shelf. On it sat a pirate guard, rifle across his knees, staring out to sea.

Rick swallowed his heart, which had climbed into his throat. They were in plain sight of the guard, or at least their heads were. He backed away as rapidly as the rough surface allowed, until the guard was no longer in sight. He and Scotty held a whispered exchange, their voices no louder than a zephyr.

"Keep your eyes off him," Rick said. "He may feel someone looking at him."

"Right. He's in a wonderful position. He looks down on the shelf where the fire is located. Did you see the ladder?"

Rick hadn't.

"It leads from his perch to the shelf. I suppose ladders lead down to the ground from there."

The guard was an obstacle Rick hadn't expected. He wondered if the guard on duty last night had seen him slug the pirate, and he decided it didn't make much difference. As Zircon had said, they had to assume the whole colony was alerted.

"Let's look out one at a time," he whispered. "I didn't see anyone on the ledge."

He inched forward once more and put his head over the edge of the drop. The fire on the rocky shelf was a small one, probably only a cooking fire.

There wasn't anyone in sight. He guessed the scientists must be in a cave under the rock on which he crouched. He could only hope they were awake.

Rick estimated the situation. It was perhaps thirty feet down to the shelf. The guard was ten feet below, and twenty feet to his right. He noticed that the guard didn't look down at the shelf. He was awake, but his attention was focused outward. In all probability he was a lookout rather than a guard, watching for signs of ship movement to the west, the direction from which danger to the pirates might be expected to come.

The boy withdrew and joined Scotty. "No sign of anyone on the shelf. I'm going to lower the radio unit, anyway."

"Okay. Let's get the rod out."

Rick had carried the rod-section case on his back, tied to shoulders and belt with line. He untied the line swiftly and assembled the rod. Scotty helped him put the reel in place and feed the line through the guides. Then Rick carefully wrapped the radio unit in his handkerchief, and put the whole thing in a black denim ditty bag borrowed from Chahda for the purpose. He secured the drawstring of the ditty bag to the end of the fishing line and inched forward again. Scotty moved forward, too, his rifle unslung and ready for action.

Rick hadn't even bothered with a note. Both Shannon and Briotti would recognize the radio unit instantly. There were no others like it outside of Spin-

drift. They would immediately put it to use and be talking to Zircon before the two boys had moved away from the position over their heads.

Carefully Rick pushed the tip of the rod out far enough so the ditty bag would clear all obstructions on the way down, then he swung the bag clear and began to feed out the line.

The bag went down an inch at a time, while he concentrated on keeping the motion slow but steady. A sudden jerk might attract the guard's attention, but very slow motion probably wouldn't.

He was sweating profusely by the time the bag got within reach of the shelf below. He began to worry. He had seen no one. Had the pirates removed the scientists, leaving the lookout in his usual position?

He kept the bag moving until suddenly strain went off the line and he knew it was down. He could see it in the faint glow from the fire, lying motionless on the rock below. Long moments ticked by and he felt the trickle of sweat down his face, the sweat of apprehension. Why didn't someone show up?

And then, as though in answer to the frantic thought, a man stepped into view below, and casually dropped his coat over the ditty bag.

Rick almost sobbed with relief. Tony Briotti! The familiar crew cut had grown long, but it was Tony!

Swiftly the boy drew his knife and cut the line, letting the loose end tumble down. Then, careful of the fishing rod, he withdrew from the edge and touched Scotty to indicate he should withdraw, too.

*A sudden jerk would attract the guard's attention*

For a few seconds they just lay there, weak with relief. Then Rick disassembled the rod and restowed it. Scotty reslung his rifle. On hands and knees, the two started their retreat. Not until they were certain that the guard could no longer see them did they stand upright and begin to move more rapidly.

Their mission was a success, but perhaps the plan was not. Rick was no longer filled with enthusiasm for his scheme. The guard had changed all that.

How were they going to get the scientists out with a guard watching them?

CHAPTER XVII

# The Radio Link

DAWN was showing its first pale light in the east when Rick and Scotty tied the vinta at the stern of the *Swift Arrow* and climbed aboard. Hobart Zircon and Chahda greeted them with relief.

"We thinking you lost or caught," Chahda said happily. "Glad we wrong."

Zircon added, "We were about to make a run toward shore, hoping to see you."

"It was the wind," Scotty said wearily. "We had to beat to windward all the way back. Did you ever try tacking a vinta for hours against a stiff breeze?"

Rick slumped down on a convenient bench. "Save the talk for later. We'd better get out of here. It's nearly daylight."

"You're right!" Zircon hurried to the controls and headed the *Swift Arrow* south. Gradually he opened the throttles until, at a safe distance from the island, the MTB was moving at full-cruising speed. Only then did the four take time to talk.

"Any radio contact?" Rick demanded.

Zircon's wide grin answered him.

"Are they all right?" Scotty yelled.

"Yes. Want to say hello?"

Rick jumped for the radio unit the scientist held out, and plugged in the earphone. Scotty took Chahda's set.

"Rick and Scotty here," Rick called. "Do you hear us?"

Tony Briotti's familiar voice answered. "Rick and Scotty! You two young cliff hangers! What took you so long to get back? Zircon kept us posted, and we were worried sick. We kept watching the village, expecting you to be hauled in as prisoners."

Rick explained about the unfavorable wind, and Scotty added, "Besides, we took it easy crossing the volcano. We hammered spikes in a few rough places to make it easier when we come back for you."

"You can't," Tony said swiftly. "Boys, believe me, we're grateful for the attempt, but you can't get away with it. There's a lookout in position to see us at all times, and there's no way you can sneak up on him. I've told Zircon this. You must not try!"

"How is Dr. Shannon?" Rick asked.

"Fine. We're all fine, although we could use a bath and some home cooking. But don't try to change the subject, Rick. You must not try to get us out of here. You'd end up in this prison, if not dead."

Rick could see that the conversation was leading nowhere, and he knew now that the scientists were all right. "We're tired, Tony," he said wearily. "It's been a rough night."

"All right, boys. One of us will be awake at all times, so call us whenever you wish."

Zircon looked at them anxiously as they put the radio units away. "How about it? Is Tony right?"

"Right as radishes," Rick assented. "The lookout is where we can't reach him, except with a gun, and the noise of a shot would defeat us. I'm sure there's some way out of this, but I can't think straight. I'm too tired."

"Below and into your bunks, both of you," Zircon commanded. "Chahda and I will stand by until we're in safe waters, then we can all get some sleep."

Rick needed no second invitation. He was asleep in five minutes. Hours later a ray of sun through the porthole woke him out of deep, dreamless slumber. He stretched luxuriously. A wash and a cold drink would be just right, he decided, and wondered how long he had been asleep. His watch told him it was two thirty in the afternoon.

He got to his feet and saw that Scotty was out of his bunk, probably on deck. Chahda was sleeping quietly, even though the swinging quiver Rick had placed on a hook near the bunk struck him in the elbow every time the boat rolled.

Rick lifted the quiver down and started to hang it where Chahda wouldn't be bothered. He paused, brows furrowed. He had the answer to their problem in his hands. An arrow was silent.

He shook his head and put the quiver away. It would mean putting a hunting arrow through the guard's head without warning. He knew perfectly

well he was incapable of killing a man in cold blood, no matter what the provocation. It would be an easy shot, but one he would never make.

Zircon and Scotty were relaxed on deck when Rick joined them after a quick shower. They greeted him soberly.

"Did you dream the right answer?" Scotty asked.

"Didn't dream at all," he retorted. "I've had only one idea, and it won't do." He told them about the bow.

Zircon smiled understandingly. "I quite agree, Rick. I couldn't do it either, even if I had the skill." He changed the subject. "I talked with Howard while you were sleeping. He agrees with Tony. We must not make the try."

"Let's not give up," Scotty pleaded. "We haven't explored every possible idea."

"True," Zircon agreed. "Rick, you don't know all that Tony and Howard told us. It seems there was a reason behind their kidnaping after all."

"What?"

"Yes. Remember the missing Filipino boy from Manila? Elpidio Torres? Seems he's a young naturalist. He ran away from home to join Shannon and Briotti when he read of their expedition in the papers. And how do you suppose he did it?"

The light dawned. "Of course! The young Moro guide!" Rick exclaimed. "I get it now. The pirates weren't after our boys at all. They were after the Torres kid. Only to get him, they had to grab Briotti and Shannon, too!"

"Exactly right. Tony and Howard didn't even know who he was. They hired him in good faith. Then, when the pirates showed up in the Bagobo village, they tried to defend the boy and got taken, too. They were brought here in the rented sailboat, along with the Torres boy. The sailboat was repainted and taken into Indonesia to be sold. Now, Tony says, the pirates are getting restless. If the ransom for the Torres boy isn't forthcoming in a few days, they may all vanish for good."

Rick swallowed hard. There must be a way to get that guard! He looked at Scotty. "Could you bean that lookout with a stone from a sling?"

Scotty shook his head. "Angle and range are wrong. I might be lucky, but I might not. If not, there goes the ball game. Of course I could make a sling easily enough."

The boys referred to the ancient variety of sling, rather than the modern slingshot. Both were adept in its use, although Scotty was the better shot.

Scotty continued, "Why does a bowshot have to be lethal? You've got some blunt arrows."

The moment the words "blunt arrows" were spoken Rick's mind went into high gear. The arrows in the quiver wouldn't do; at that range, with so powerful a bow, even a blunt arrow in the head would kill. But if he could somehow give the arrow a broader and blunter head, so the impact would be spread over a greater area, it could stun without killing.

"Professor, get the details on when the lookout is

changed and anything else that might be useful," Rick said quickly. "I think I've got an idea that will work, thanks to Scotty's comment."

He hurried below, went forward, and rummaged around in the rope locker. He moved to the paint locker and examined everything within reach. There was nothing suitable. Disappointed, he went on deck and examined the superstructure. A wooden barrel plug would be ideal, but they didn't have a barrel aboard. There was only a fifty-gallon steel drum used as a spare fuel supply. If worst came to worst, he could fashion a head from a piece of the fender board. Then his eyes suddenly fell on the flagstaff astern and he let out a yell of delight.

Scotty and Zircon watched as he unshipped the staff from its holder and pulled it down. It had a gilded sphere about the size of a baseball on top. Rick tested it anxiously. It was glued tightly.

"Scotty!" Zircon bellowed. "There's a saw in the tool chest, and I believe I saw a brace and bits."

Both Scotty and Zircon had seen instantly what Rick was after. The large, smooth ball would spread the arrow's impact over a greater area. Scotty returned in a moment with the tools, and sawed the ball off. Then Rick got a blunt arrow from the quiver and cut the metal tip off with his knife. He bored a hole of the proper size in the base of the ball. The arrow fitted perfectly.

Rick tested the balance of the now-ungainly arrow and shook his head. "I'm not sure I can hit anything with it."

"Get the bow!" Zircon commanded. "Scotty, put a screw through the base of the ball to hold it on the shaft. I'm going to rig a backstop so Rick can practice."

The scientist found a tarpaulin and strung it up like a curtain across the stern. At the center of the tarpaulin he pinned a work glove.

Rick studied the setup. The canvas would give, absorbing the shock of the arrow and allowing it to fall on deck. It would be all right. He didn't want to chance losing the ball.

He consulted with Scotty, and they paced off the approximate distance he would have to shoot, then he climbed on the pilothouse roof to get the proper elevation. Spreading the bow a few times to loosen his muscles, he began to practice.

The arrow was terribly nose heavy, and its whole response to the bow was changed. At first he missed by two or three feet. Then, as he continued to practice, his accuracy began to improve.

He stopped after a while and had a coke. "I'll never be able to shoot a normal arrow again," he complained.

Scotty grinned. "Make this shot and you'll never have to shoot again."

By the time Chahda emerged, rubbing sleep from his eyes, Rick was on target. Four out of five shots hit the glove. Then, nine out of ten were in the palm.

Zircon called a halt, took the glove from the tarp, and slipped it on. He tucked a folded handkerchief

into the glove, then stood with hand outstretched before the tarp. "Hit it," he invited.

"I'll hurt you," Rick objected.

"No. My hand will give with the arrow. I want an idea of the impact."

Rick nodded. He nocked the arrow, took a firm stance, and drew. For an instant he held, then loosed smoothly.

The ball smacked into the scientist's hand. The scientist swung lightly with the blow and stood grinning, the ball and its projecting shaft held firmly in his hand.

"A real beanball," Zircon boomed. "It will do, Rick. Now check your equipment and put it away. We have to make plans."

Rick realized the professor had chosen an apt simile when he said beanball. Like a fast ball hurled by a big-league pitcher, the arrow could be caught in the hand, but would knock for a loop anyone it hit in the head. Now all he had to do was shoot straight just one time.

Zircon gathered the boys around him. "Tony says the lookout changes at sundown, and again sometime near dawn. So, if we make our try as soon after dark as possible, we'll have until dawn to return. And this time, there will be no beating to windward with the vinta. We'll take it in as you did last night. But when it's time to leave, Chahda will come after us in the big boat. Meanwhile, we say nothing to Tony and Howard. We'll explain after we've landed."

The Hindu boy looked pained. "I not go?"

Zircon put a hand gently on the boy's wounded shoulder. "You can't climb without opening that shoulder, Chahda. So you're elected to operate the boat. You'll keep your own radio set and we'll call you in when we're ready to be taken off. And when we call, come a-running!"

"That I will do," Chahda promised.

"Right. Now, from your description of the climb, boys, I think we need a few rope ladders. Let's get started making them!"

CHAPTER XVIII

# Under Cover of Darkness

HOBART ZIRCON'S usually booming voice couldn't have been heard more than two yards away as he spoke into the tiny Megabuck radio unit.

"We're starting down the western slope of the volcano. How are things, Tony?"

Rick and Scotty, their ears close to the tiny earphone Zircon held out, heard Briotti's reply. The kidnaped scientists had given up trying to dissuade them.

"Everything normal, Hobart. The lookout is settling down now. He's one of the regulars. He relaxes completely as a sleeping cat, but he's wide awake. Don't let his appearance deceive you."

"We won't," Zircon promised. "We'll call you again as we get into the danger zone. Chahda?"

The Hindu boy answered instantly. "Here."

"Fine. Keep listening and you'll know how we're doing."

"Will do. Tell Rick shoot straight."

Rick grinned. It was good advice. Nevertheless,

apprehension had kept him in a sweat. He had never before been in a position where success or failure—and probably all their lives—hung on a single shot.

Scotty put a reassuring hand on his shoulder. "This is just another shot, old son. You've made far tougher ones on the course back home."

"He's right." Hobart Zircon added. "You showed this afternoon that you could hit a small target with that unwieldly club you invented. Let's go."

Scotty took the lead, following the route he and Rick had explored the night before. Rick followed close on his heels, and Zircon brought up the rear. In spite of his bulk, the scientist was light-footed and silent.

They reached a point where the boys had tied a rope to a boulder the night before and now they paused to attach the rope ladder Rick carried. It was one of four they had fashioned. Two already had been placed. Zircon carried the last one. Scotty went down first, with Zircon following cautiously.

The ropes creaked, but held. Zircon stepped to firm ground and Rick followed down the ladder. They negotiated a bend in the trail, then Scotty stopped and held up his hand.

Rick took Shannon's bow from the quiver. While he was getting ready, Zircon made a last check with Tony and Chahda. When Rick signaled, Scotty led the way down the last few dozen yards of steep lava to the final shelf.

There, just out of sight of the guard, Scotty unslung his rifle. The dark-haired boy went forward

and peered over the edge of rock that shielded them. For a long moment he surveyed the scene below, then backed away. Rick caught his gesture. It was time.

He had planned how he would do this. He couldn't shoot in a lying-down position, and kneeling would expose him to the guard just as surely as standing upright would do—if the guard happened to be looking. So, he would shoot while standing erect. His accuracy would be better that way.

Rick fitted the arrow's nock to the bowstring, got his fingers in position to draw, and flexed the bow slightly. Then, taking a deep breath, he stepped calmly forward to the edge of rock.

It took only three steps to bring him within sight of the guard. He had a quick vision of a black velvet cap, hunched shoulders, and a rifle held casually across the knees. He drew smoothly, held for the briefest instant, and released the shaft.

Scotty was at his side, rifle ready, the moment the shaft left the bow.

It wasn't necessary. Rick had an instant's impression of sound, like a baseball slapping into a catcher's mitt. The guard didn't even move from his position. His shoulders slumped a little more and his head went forward between his knees. He stayed that way. The arrow skittered across the stone shelf and stopped.

Rick knew his aim had been a little off. The ball had caught the guard behind the ear, instead of directly in the back of the head. Cold sweat bathed

the boy at the nearness of it. He had almost missed!

But there wasn't time to think about that now. Scotty and Zircon were already moving into action. The big scientist unwound the rope ladder from around his waist while Scotty drove spikes into a cleft in the lava. His wooden mallet, muffled with cloth padding, made only a dull, almost inaudible sound.

Zircon secured the end of the ladder to the spikes, then put his weight on it, testing. It held. He moved forward, and lowered the free end over the cliff.

Rick and Scotty stood by to give a hand to the men on the ledge below. They were already on their way, Howard Shannon first.

Rick eyed the village anxiously. He was sure they were practically invisible against the dark lava, but he wouldn't feel secure until they had moved out of sight.

Shannon reached the top, and Rick and Scotty helped him over. A Filipino boy was next up, and Rick knew this must be the famous Elpidio Torres. The boy came up the ladder like a sailor and scrambled over the top without help.

Tony Briotti was last. The youthful archaeologist wasted no time in swarming up the ladder to the top, and in a moment the six of them were shaking hands in silent glee.

Scotty pulled the ladder up, so it wouldn't be seen dangling, then whispered urgently, "Let's get going."

By prearrangement, Scotty led the way with Zir-

con next in line, followed by Shannon, Briotti, and the Filipino boy, with Rick bringing up the rear. He paused long enough to unstring the bow and put it back in the quiver.

As the group paused before making the difficult stage of the journey around the cone, Rick took the Megabuck unit from Tony. In the excitement no one had called Chahda.

"On our way back now, Chahda," Rick said calmly. "All six of us."

The Hindu boy's yell of triumph and relief almost shattered Rick's eardrum. He whispered, "Stow it, you wild Indian. You'll ruin my hearing."

"Sorry," Chahda said, but he didn't sound it. "Hurry back now. I wait for word to come."

Rick followed as the group started off again. He wondered how the guard was doing. By all reckoning, the man should still be unconscious. He'd better be!

The party reached the eastern slope of the volcano, directly under the cone, and started the last descent. The rope ladders made the trip comparatively easy, except for the final drop before the ground leveled off somewhat. It was a rough stretch, too long for a ladder. A single rope had been saved for the purpose. Rick took it from Scotty and made it fast around a spike they had driven earlier. Zircon was the first to use it. He went down swiftly, keeping hold of the rope in case of a slip.

Scotty followed, then Shannon. The lanky zoologist was halfway down when Rick felt the rope

tighten with a jerk and he heard Shannon's choked cry of pain. Rick rechecked to be sure the rope was secure, then motioned to Briotti and the Filipino boy. "Go on. We've got to get down to him."

Scotty and Zircon, climbing back from below, reached Shannon's side before Rick and the others could get there. In a few moments the six were clustered together.

"A rock turned under me," Shannon explained. "I felt the bone snap in my leg. You'd better go on. You can send help back to me later."

"Nonsense," Zircon grated. "Boys, what can we use for a splint?"

Rick was already pulling arrows out of the quiver. "These are Dr. Shannon's. I'm sure he won't mind if we use them."

"You have my permission," Shannon said with a painful chuckle.

The blunt-headed arrows were quickly lashed into two bundles. Rick and Scotty shed their light jackets and Scotty's knife flashed in the faint starlight as he sliced them into padding. Rick took the extra bowstrings from the quiver and handed them to Zircon. The bowstrings would make ideal ties. Within a short time Shannon's leg was securely splinted and Zircon was giving instructions.

"Scotty, go untie the rope and bring it down. You and Rick will hold from above, while Tony and I carry Howard. You, Mr. Torres, will please stay directly in front of us to test the footing and warn us of loose stones."

"Of course, sir," the Filipino boy replied quickly.

Scotty returned from his climb with the rope coiled. He made several turns around Shannon's waist, pulled the rope up under his armpits, and secured it with a bowline.

"Slow and easy does it," Zircon directed.

Slow was the key word. Rick and Scotty kept the safety line taut while Briotti and Zircon moved the injured man an inch at a time, bracing themselves against the rock and feeling for each step. Zircon, the most powerful of them all, had to carry most of the scientist's weight.

Rick was worried. The trip across the volcano had taken quite a while and now time was running out on them. He looked at the luminous dial of his watch and realized with a sudden chill that dawn was only a half hour away. "We've got to hurry," he said.

"They change the lookout just before dawn," Tony said. "Even if he's still unconscious we won't have much time once they find him!"

"You're right." Zircon stopped and began untying the rope that secured Shannon.

"What are you doing?" Scotty asked anxiously.

"Changing methods," Zircon said grimly. He handed the rope to Scotty. "Cut off a length and tie Howard to me. Then secure the remainder under my armpits."

Rick knew that it would be a terrible strain on the big scientist, but it would be faster—if his strength held out.

Zircon picked Shannon up in his arms, and Scotty lashed them together, making a kind of sling that would help support Shannon's weight. Then he tied one end of the remaining rope around Zircon's barrel chest, up under his armpits.

Rick, Scotty, Briotti, and the Filipino boy grasped the rope and held it firmly while the big scientist walked upright down the remaining slope, one slow step after another, the others following but always keeping the rope tight in case he started to fall.

They negotiated the hardest part of the slope, then Zircon leaned back against a boulder and rested for a moment. The final hundred yards wasn't steep, but it was strewn with loose boulders and lava chunks. Zircon wouldn't be able to speed up much. Rick looked at his watch again, then at the sky. He didn't say anything. The big physicist was doing more than any man should be asked to do. He couldn't do it any faster.

Scotty moved to his side. "Got arrows left?"

"Yes. Most of the big broadheads and half a dozen of the small broadheads. Why?"

"We may need them. I'm scared. The guard's relief must know by now that his pal got conked."

"We're both scared," Rick corrected. "But what can we do?"

"Be ready to fight."

Zircon called hoarsely, "Let's go!"

They were off again, the scientist plodding slowly ahead, down the last stretch to the cove. About half of the distance had been covered when Rick saw the

first sail. It was close to shore, near the cove where they had anchored the vinta.

Zircon saw it, too. He called softly, "Scotty! Leave the rope to the others. Get ahead of me and cover us. But don't shoot until they start something."

Scotty moved ahead, unslinging his rifle as he went.

Zircon speeded up as much as possible. Fortunately, the going was easier now and the big scientist could make better time. Rick helped to keep the rope braced, and tried to divide his attention between watching the uncertain footing and looking for other sails.

The first pirate vinta was nosing into the cove when two others came into sight. And, at nearly the same moment, Zircon reached the small patch of level ground at the cove's edge.

Rick dropped the rope and hurried to the big scientist's side, drawing his knife. He cut the ropes that bound Shannon to Zircon, and they lowered the injuried zoologist to a sitting position with a big rock at his back.

Dawn was breaking fast now. Already Rick could see details more clearly and he knew it was only minutes to practically full daylight. The Spindrift group could see the pirate vintas clearly now against the sea, but the pirates could not yet see them because they were still in shadow, dark rock at their backs. Still, the pirates would try the cove first. It was the logical place.

He estimated their chances quickly, and saw that

the situation was hopeless. There was no chance of getting their vinta past the pirates. They would have to fight. He drew the bow sections out of the quiver and got ready. Next to him, Zircon was checking the clip in his pistol.

Rick took the Megabuck network unit from his pocket and called softly, "Chahda!"

"Here, Rick. Long time wait. How things go?"

"Not good. Shannon broke a leg. Also, we're at the cove, which is filling up with pirate vintas. We're cut off."

Chahda whistled. "I say plenty no good! Look, you figure way to get to clear water. I figure way to pick you up. Starting right now!"

"Okay," Rick said, without knowing how it could be done. "Come on in, but don't get trapped!"

There was a sudden chorus of pirate yells, then one of the Moros fired a shot. Scotty's rifle snapped, and pirate rifles answered. The fight was on! Rick grabbed a broadhead arrow from the quiver and hurried forward.

CHAPTER XIX

# Chahda Sweeps the Sea

THE exchange of rifleshots lasted only a few moments without causing casualties to either side. Scotty had fired more in warning than to score a hit. The Spindrifters had taken cover behind the rocks, and the protection had been enough.

Rick sized up the situation. More vintas were crowding into the cove. There were so many now they got in each other's way. Before long the entire cove would be jammed with vintas and the Moros would come swarming ashore. Unfortunately, the sea was calm, with only low surf on the eastern shore. Heavy breakers would have been helpful in keeping the pirates busy, Rick thought.

One thing was clear as glass. They couldn't wait for the pirates to overrun them. Rick hurried to Zircon's side. "Professor, can you carry Shannon? We've got to get to the other side of the cove, then across the rocks to the sea. It's a better position to defend, and we might have a chance to get to the water when Chahda comes. I've called him. He's on the way in."

"Rick's right," Scotty chimed in. "Get going and I'll cover you."

Zircon nodded without speaking. He stepped swiftly to Shannon's side and picked the zoologist up. Then he followed Rick to the end of the cove and started the climb over the tiny spit of land that separated the cove from the open sea.

It was rough going. Tony Briotti gave Zircon a hand over the roughest places, while Rick and Elpidio Torres stood by to assist where needed. Scotty stayed at the edge of the cove, rifle at the ready.

The pirates hadn't gotten organized yet. The Spindrifters were still in deep shadow and not clearly visible. Now and then a pirate took a rifleshot, but that was more from lack of discipline than a target at which to shoot.

Rick hoped that the Spindrift group could reach the seaward side of the spit they were now climbing before the pirates swarmed ashore. There was a good chance of defending the spit, particularly with Scotty's rifle.

Zircon reached the top and went over, and Rick called, "Scotty! Come on!"

Scotty instantly turned and ran.

A hail of badly aimed rifle slugs spattered off the rock across an area forty feet wide as the pirates shot at the sound of Rick's voice. None came near the mark. Then, a few pirates, smarter than the rest, realized what was going on. As Tony Briotti and the Torres boy were silhouetted briefly against the sky at the top of the rise, the handful of alert pirates

fired. Most shots missed, but Rick heard the Filipino boy gasp.

Scotty reached Rick's side and said softly, "Let's go, and slide over the top on your stomach."

Rick didn't need the advice. He had no intention of letting the pirates catch him in silhouette. He crouched low and moved the few feet to the top, found a boulder, and slipped quickly around it. Scotty followed a moment later.

"I'm staying here at the top," Scotty said. "If any pirates try to come after us, I'll have a clear shot. And when they get wise and come around to the sea side, I can shoot down on them. How are we going to get out of this?"

"You tell me," Rick suggested. "I don't know."

The pirates hadn't been long in catching on. A few vintas were already rounding the cove point heading for the party now huddled behind boulders on a ledge just above the sea. Rick hurried down to join the others, leaving Scotty to guard the rear.

Tony Briotti greeted him. "Look."

Rick's eyes followed the archaeologist's pointing finger. Off to the southeast, on a sea tinted pink from the rising sun, he saw the low lines of the *Swift Arrow*. Chahda was on his way!

Zircon bellowed, "Watch it!" He echoed his words with the flat slap of a pistol shot. The first vinta had reached the group and was standing only a few feet offshore. Others were crowding in behind it. Rick got ready to shoot again, and saw that the Torres

boy, a bloody handkerchief tied around his upper arm, was throwing rocks with his good hand. Tony Briotti followed suit, picking up large chunks of lava and slamming them into the pirate craft.

Rick spotted a rifleman in the nearest vinta and sent a broadhead arrow at him. The arrow passed between the pirate's arm and side, but pinned him by his shirt to the vinta mast. Rick quickly nocked another arrow and waited for a clear shot.

Behind him, Scotty's rifle spoke once, twice, then a third time. Yells from beyond the spit of land showed that the pirates had tried to come at them overland. Rick hoped Scotty's single rifle would be enough. At least his pal was shooting from cover, while the pirates were in the open.

A vinta tried to approach and Rick sent an arrow into the helmsman's shoulder. The vinta sheered off and collided with another.

It was only a question of time before the pirates were forced ashore by their very numbers. Rick knew that his small group wouldn't last long, not against barongs and krises. He shot again, and took a pirate rifleman out of the action. Zircon's heavy automatic picked off the first pirate that tried to climb ashore, and slammed him back onto his fellows.

Tony Briotti aided the sudden pile-up of pirates with a chunk of lava the size of a basketball. Sudden screams of pain and rage came from the mass of struggling Moros.

Other vintas had pulled into shore farther away

and Rick saw pirates scrambling up the rock unhindered. He got two with arrows, then Scotty fired from his vantage point and drove them to cover.

Above the Moro battle cries and screams of rage Rick suddenly heard the horn blast of the *Swift Arrow*. He looked up in time to see Chahda driving at full speed, parallel with the beach. As the Hindu boy drew close, the *Swift Arrow*'s saluting cannon suddenly erupted a load of tacks into the cluster of vintas. The pirates scrambled to cover against this new menace as the MTB swept by. The terrific bow wave lifted the vintas high and sent them crashing into one another. Two of them turned over.

Rick fell back and grabbed his radio unit, quickly plugging in the earphone. "Chahda! That was great!"

The Hindu boy sounded excited. "I make short turn now, do same thing again, only closer. You get ready. When I toot horn, you get to water somehow. Okay?"

"We'll try," Rick answered grimly. He beckoned to Scotty, who came down to join him, keeping a watchful eye to the rear in case a pirate tried to come over the rise. The two hurried to Zircon's side. Rick said swiftly, "We've got to get to the water. Chahda's coming back right now. We have to be ready when he toots."

Zircon handed Tony the pistol. "Keep their heads down, Tony. I'm going to take Howard up the shore to that nearest vinta. The rest of you come after me. Hurry it up! We'll have to swim for it, unless we can grab the vinta."

The big scientist reached Shannon's side just as Chahda started his second run. Again the Hindu boy opened with a blast from the saluting cannon, then crowded close inshore, letting his bow wave drive the vintas hard against each other and the shore. The crashing vintas sent their crews down in heaps. The MTB was so close to shore that Rick could see the string Chahda had rigged to trigger the cannon by remote control.

The pirates were too busy to worry about the Spindrifters for the moment. Zircon scooped Shannon up and hurried along the shore, ignoring the wash from the MTB that lashed over the rocks. Rick and Scotty were right behind him, weapons ready.

A vinta with only two pirates aboard was scraping back down over the rock. The rest of its crew were struggling in the water.

"Get them!" Zircon yelled.

Rick caught one with an arrow just as the man rose to a sitting position on the gunwale. The heavy shaft carried him over the side. Scotty's rifle sent the other one to the bottom of the vinta in a heap.

The boys moved fast, grabbing the vinta before the retreating waves carried it away. Zircon jumped in, turning as he did so. He fell, the zoologist in his arms. The mast took the blow of the scientist's great weight and broke off short, leaving a tangle of sail, mast, and boom.

"Get in!" Scotty yelled at Tony and Torres. His rifle barked at the pirates further up the beach, driv-

ing them to cover again. Zircon put Shannon down and heaved the pirate Scotty had wounded onto the shore.

Rick followed Tony and Torres into the boat, then yelled for Scotty to push off. He grabbed the radio unit again and called, "Chahda! What do we do now?"

"Get little way from shore and go into water. Catch rope when I come. All must catch! You watch when I toot horn, and you see."

Rick yelled the instructions to the others, then stuffed the set back into his pocket, dropped his bow, and took a paddle. Scotty knelt beside him, a length of board in his hand. "Let's go, boy," he said urgently.

Under the impetus of Scotty's initial shove and the boys' paddles the vinta moved slowly out until it was a good thirty feet from shore. The nearest of the pirate craft moved to intercept it, four Moros at the paddles.

Scotty stopped paddling and started shooting. The pirates dropped paddles and dove to the bottom of the vinta.

Rick looked about anxiously. Where was Chahda?

Then he saw the MTB making a sweeping turn at the northern tip of the island. As he watched, Chahda straightened out and the bow wave of the MTB curled as he picked up speed.

"Better get in the water!" Rick called. "Tony, give me the pistol, and take Shannon's bow and

quiver. Better hang them both on your back. Scotty and I will stay in the vinta and cover you!"

Tony nodded and exchanged weapons. "I'll help Zircon with Shannon. Come on, Pete. Over the side and swim out a little way."

The Torres boy responded at once, diving headlong into the water. Tony followed and took Shannon as Zircon handed the injured man down. Then Zircon got into the water, too, and led the four away from the vinta.

Rick and Scotty watched the tangle of pirate craft, waiting for the next pirate boat to get untangled and make a try for them. Chahda's bow wave had left the pirate fleet in a shambles, some of the vintas turned over, nearly all with sails and booms in a heap on deck or over the pirates.

One vinta extricated itself and the pirates suddenly located the boys. A Moro raised his rifle to fire and found it smashed in his hands as Scotty snapped off a shot. The pirate's stock splintered and the force of the slug smashed the barrel across his face. He went down.

Then one of the pirates on shore made a try. He stood upright, rifle poised. Rick fired with the heavy automatic. He missed. The pirate looked at the silvery spatter of lead on a rock two inches from his right knee and dove for cover.

Chahda flashed by, and the bow wave lifted Rick and Scotty high into the air. They grabbed at the vinta with their free hands and had to grip tightly

to keep from being thrown as it rolled wildly. Rick snapped the safety on and lowered the hammer to half cock, then tucked the pistol securely in his belt. For a moment he hung on with both hands, then called to Scotty.

"Let's hit the drink!"

Scotty was trying to sling his rifle on his back while holding on with one hand. He gave it up and went over the side. Once in the sea, he rose to the surface and got the rifle sling into position. Rick waited until the vinta was on the downward slope of the backwash from the shore, then went in head-first. The cool water engulfed him and he twisted upward and broke the surface.

Scotty was waiting. The two of them swam outward, to where the other four were treading water, waiting for Chahda.

Rick heard the MTB's horn let go with a long blast, and he rose high out of the water to look. For a moment he thought Chahda was out of control, because the big boat was spinning in a tight circle. That could only be done by putting one engine in full reverse and the other in full forward!

Then the boy saw what Chahda had done. The centrifugal force of the whirling MTB sent a fifty-gallon drum dancing across the water to the full length of a long rope. As the barrel swung wide, Chahda straightened out and put on speed.

"Come on!" Rick yelled at Scotty. He stretched out in the water for a fast sprint. Leave it to Chahda! Had he tried to swing the barrel out while traveling

in a straight line, it would merely have fallen astern. Circling the MTB at a fast speed was the only way to get the rope out far enough from the boat to give them all a chance of grabbing it.

Rick looked up and saw that both he and Scotty were just inside the path that the barrel was traveling. It was falling astern now that Chahda was on a straight course, but it would still be far enough away from the side to catch them all.

He stopped and looked at his friends, and saw that Zircon had locked his legs around Shannon's chest and was ready. Tony and Torres were facing the oncoming MTB, ready to grab.

"Stand by," he called to Scotty.

"Don't miss it," Scotty called back.

Chahda flashed by.

Rick had a quick glimpse of Zircon being hauled along like an oversized surfboard, then the rope was on him. He grabbed with both hands and braced himself for the shock. The jerk on his arms was tremendous, but he held tight and flailed his legs to get his head above water. After one gasping breath he managed to turn himself against the force of the water and lay flat on his stomach. By arching his back, he brought his face above water, and in a moment he was planing along like a water ski. Next to him on the rope Scotty had done the same.

Rick counted anxiously, then heaved a relieved sigh. All present! But unless Chahda slowed down soon, Shannon would be in serious trouble. Apparently the Hindu boy was keeping a close watch

on his catch. He dropped his speed until he was barely making headway, giving Zircon a chance to pull Shannon up to the rope where the injured man could help himself.

Then Chahda hauled in on the rope until Zircon was directly alongside. The Hindu boy had thrown over the ship's boarding ladder. Zircon grabbed it and held.

Rick and Scotty left the rope and swam rapidly toward the boat. Both had realized that Zircon would need help. So had Tony, who was already helping Shannon to the ladder.

Chahda lowered a line with a bowline in the end, and Zircon slipped the loop over Shannon's shoulders and made sure it was secure under his arms. Then the big scientist hurried up the ladder and called down, "Hold him away from the side! Rick, get on the ladder. Scotty, come help me. Tony, keep his feet clear."

In a moment all hands were in position. Rick wrapped one leg around a wooden rung and slipped one arm behind the ropes. Then, as Scotty and Zircon hauled, he held Shannon out from the boat so the injured leg could not strike the side or a rung.

As soon as Shannon's shoulders were at the railing, Tony went by Rick and helped pull the scientist aboard. Rick waited to give Torres a hand, noting as the Filipino boy climbed up that the rough bandage on his wounded arm was stained with fresh blood. The boy gave him a wide grin as he climbed to safety.

*Rick braced himself for the shock*

A rifle slug interrupted Rick's answering grin. It slapped into the hull only a few feet away. With his free hand he found his knife and severed the rope that held the barrel, then he called, "Go, Chahda! Get out of here!"

The roar of the twin engines was his answer. By the time he had climbed over the side and hauled in the ladder, the MTB was reaching top speed as Chahda put the pirate island astern.

Rick glanced back. The pirate vintas were still clustered around the shore near the cove. Far above them, the black rock of the volcano was pink with the rays of the newly risen sun.

For long moments Rick stared at Shan, then he turned with a grin to shake hands with his friends.

CHAPTER XX

# The Patrol Takes Over

COLONEL FELIX ROJAS of the Philippines Constabulary paced the deck of the *Swift Arrow* while he listened to the story related by the Spindrifters. Next to the MTB was a gunboat of the Philippines Naval Patrol, and beyond that a destroyer-escort loaded to the gunwales with constabulary troopers.

Rick and his friends had arrived at the port of Dalun, on Tawi Tawi, just in time to catch the two-ship convoy that was about to leave in search of them. The presence of Colonel Rojas was a surprise, but, as he explained, once reports of the pirates reached him, he had taken the next plane home to assume command.

The group in the pilothouse of the MTB was complete, except for Shannon and Elpidio Torres who were receiving medical treatment on the gunboat.

Hobart Zircon covered the story from the point of view of the searchers, then Tony Briotti filled in the details of what had happened to him, Shannon, and "Pete" Torres.

Colonel Rojas listened without interruption, then shook his head. "I can't understand it. The pirates didn't want you and Dr. Shannon. They wanted the Torres boy. Why didn't they simply kill the two of you?"

Tony Briotti shrugged. "It wasn't simple humanity, believe me. They have none. I think they realized that Pete Torres had to be returned alive. His father is too important a man in this country for Pete to be harmed. It would mean that the entire armed forces of the country would be turned loose to hunt the pirates down. So, if they planned to send Pete home after getting the ransom, they also had to return us."

"Because young Torres would have reported your deaths, and the Philippines armed forces would probably be augmented by American warships," Colonel Rojas finished. "That's as good a reason as any. We'll accept it for lack of anything else."

Rick spoke up. "There's one hole in Tony's reasoning. They also had to assume that once the prisoners were released, the authorities would have a description of the island. So it would only be a matter of time before the pirate hangout was located."

"Sorry, Rick," Tony corrected. "None of us had the remotest idea of where we were, or what the island looked like. We were brought in by night, blindfolded, and taken to the cliff cave. From there we could see only the western shore. Why, we didn't

even know we were on the side of a volcano until you took us off."

"That gives your reason even greater acceptance," Zircon boomed. "Actually, what puzzles me is why the pirates kept you so long. Usually, if ransom isn't forthcoming pretty fast, the victims are never seen alive."

Rojas answered, "That's generally true, I'm sure. But we have to remember the distances and lack of communications in this part of the world. Also, the ransom was a million pesos. No one has that much in cash, even a wealthy man like Torres. He had sent word that he would pay, but that it would take many days to raise the cash in small bills. His deadline was the day after tomorrow."

The ransom would never be paid now, Rick thought. Cables had been sent to Manila and Spindrift the very first thing, while Shannon and Torres were being moved to the gunboat's sick bay.

Zircon waved a big hand. "Anyway, it's all over now, and reasons become less important. My question, Colonel Rojas, is what are you going to do about these pirates? I'm sure you can wipe out the main island, but there are groups on many other islands."

The constabulary officer smiled grimly. "We will strike Shan just before dawn tomorrow. I assure you that my men and the sailors of the patrol will take pleasure in breaking up that little nest. As for the other groups, that is a more difficult problem."

"You need spies," Chahda stated.

"We do," Rojas agreed. "However, once the main island is taken, the local groups will have no central leadership. I might add that Paulo Lacson has already broken up the Davao gang."

"So fast?" Scotty asked incredulously.

"Three days ago. The Bagobos had reasons to fear reprisals, you see, and Paulo took no chances. He kept a platoon with full automatic weapons hidden in the village houses. The pirate gang attacked and got a very warm reception. Those who survived are prisoners."

"Good for Major Lacson!" Rick exclaimed. "We were impressed by his efficiency. You can see why."

"How about Zamboanga?" Zircon boomed.

"Apparently there is no gang there. Captain Lim released the Moro you caught, but he's back in custody again, recaptured by Lim as soon as orders went out from Manila. Lim believes he's one of the main leaders of the pirates, partly because he personally checked on you in Manila, then followed you to Zamboanga. The gang nearest Zamboanga is the one that tried to get you in the channel. Another gunboat is searching the area right now, trying to locate an island fishing colony with too many armed vintas and too many rifles."

"Maybe you can find pirate pigeons and turn loose," Chahda offered. "Then planes could follow."

Rojas stared at the boy thoughtfully, "Now there is a useful idea. I'll get off a general instruction to look for pigeon cotes."

Tony Briotto chuckled. "He's full of ideas. Now, if he can only get one about cleaning the polish from Rick's face so we can recognize him again, we can call this case closed."

A hail from the gunboat brought the talk to a halt. Shannon and Torres were ready to rejoin the party. The scientist's broken leg was in a cast, with a steel brace at the bottom so that he would be able to walk around, cast and all, in a few days. Pete Torres had a neat bandage on his arm; apparently the Filipino Naval medico had removed the pirate rifle slug easily enough.

Once the group was assembled again, Rojas asked, "What are your plans?"

"Back to Manila from Zamboanga, and then to Spindrift by the first plane," Zircon stated.

"Go if you like," Howard Shannon said calmly. "Tony and I haven't even started our work here. We're staying."

"You can't go rambling around with a broken leg," Zircon roared.

"Whose leg is it? Besides, I work with my head, not my legs."

Scotty whispered to Rick, "Who's going to win?"

Rick grinned. "Shannon. Zircon's yelling too loud. That means he's only arguing for effect."

His prediction was right. After a few more exchanges Zircon turned to the boys. "You want to stay on with these stubborn idiots?"

"Maybe for a little while," Rick said, and Scotty nodded.

Zircon threw up his hands. "All right! If we all pitch in, maybe we can leave sooner."

Chahda offered, "Pretty good vacation, maybe. I stay a while."

"If you stay, you'll need a guide, won't you?" Elpidio Torres asked hesitatingly.

The Spindrifters stared at him, then broke into laughter.

"That makes it unanimous," Rick said with a grin. "If Pete can get permission from his father."

Colonel Rojas looked at the group with admiration. "Nothing stops you, does it? Not even being kidnaped by pirates and held for weeks."

"It wasn't so bad," Tony Briotti replied. "They fed us, and we weren't mistreated, except for being knocked around that first night. We're healthy enough, barring Howard's leg and Pete's arm."

Zircon sighed. "Well, I suppose we can go back to Zamboanga and start over again. We'll have to talk with Santos about his missing boat. Let's hope you can recover it, through diplomatic channels, or something. Otherwise, I'm sure his insurance will take care of it."

Colonel Rojas coughed. "This expedition against Shan won't take more than a day or two, and I'm in need of a little rest myself. I may join you."

His announcement was greeted with cheers.

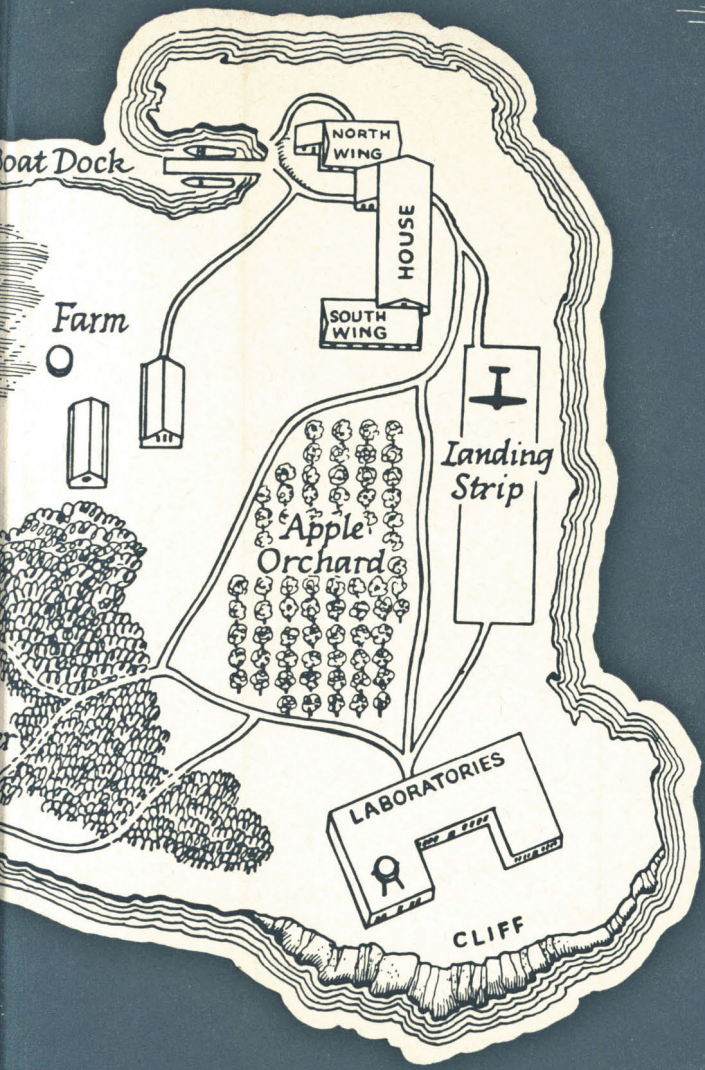
"There's only one thing that bothers me about this plan." Tony Briotti said, "Howard and I are peaceful folk, on a peaceful mission. But we know from long

experience that when Rick, Scotty, and Chahda walk into a place, peace flies out the window."

"It's already flown for this trip," Rick pointed out. "We weren't the ones who chased it, either."

"No," Tony said warmly. "If we haven't really thanked you, it's only because words just aren't adequate. You didn't drive peace away this time, but you certainly brought it back!"

Cultivated Land
Wooded Land
Tidal Flats
CLIFF
CLEARING
Pirate
Rocket
New Jersey Coast




# SPINDRIFT ISLAND